

PREPARING FOR THE CONTEMPORARY WORKFORCE:  
PLANNING A JOB READINESS WORKSHOP FOR TRADES STUDENTS

THESIS

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MASTER OF ADULT EDUCATION

BY

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis is a description of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of job readiness workshops designed for trades students at the Atlantic University College. The purpose of the workshops was to prepare students for their 2-week community work experience, a mandatory component of their trades training. The focus of the study was to answer the following research questions: First, what are the needs of the trades students in the trades education department of Atlantic University College (AUC) and what are the job readiness expectations of prospective employers in the region? Second, how can I, as an adult educator, plan a job readiness program for AUC trades students that addresses these diverse needs? Third, how can I facilitate such a job readiness program for AUC trades students? I hypothesized that a job readiness component should be added to the trades curriculum if three conditions existed. First, the chair, instructors, and students in the trades department should support the need for such a curriculum. Second, local employers should identify job readiness skills as part of their expectations when hiring. Finally, there should be evidence that students would benefit from participating in job readiness training for purposes of their 2-week community work.

The methods used to address the research questions included meeting with the chair and instructors in the trades department, conducting a needs assessment of students in the automotive and heavy duty pre-employment trades programs, and an off-campus survey questionnaire of automotive and heavy duty employers. I then implemented two, 1-day job readiness workshops and, finally, I conducted an evaluation of the study. The

evaluation included a workshop evaluation by participants, feedback from employers who hosted workshop participants on their work experience, and student follow-up upon completion of their work experience. The workshop participants and a comparison group who did not participate in a job readiness workshop were both involved in the follow-up survey.

Literature specific to adult learning perspectives, ways of fostering adult learning, program planning, and contemporary workforce demands informed and guided the research. Outcomes indicated that the department chair and instructors supported the need for a job readiness workshop; and that local employers expected a level of job readiness skills when hiring new employees. It was evident that students would benefit from a job readiness workshop in preparation for their 2-week work experience. Data collected from the study support the recommendation that the trades department at Atlantic University College should incorporate a job readiness curriculum into its pre-employment training program.

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Finally, this thesis is dedicated to two very important people in my life. First, my mother, Frances LeBlanc, who, in my opinion, is a pioneer of lifelong learning. She instilled in me the importance of continued, formal education. More important, she taught me the value of informal learning. Second, my husband, Dave Scott, whose support for my learning made it possible for my work to be a priority whenever necessary. He has been a role model for self-directed learning and has exemplified for me the notion that learning is truly a privilege.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iii
<b><u>CHAPTER</u></b>	<b><u>PAGE</u></b>
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background Information.....	2
The Problem Statement.....	4
Purpose of the Study.....	5
The Design of the Study.....	7
Scope and Limitations.....	9
Assumptions.....	10
Definition of Terms.....	11
Plan of Presentation.....	13
2. A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	14
The Nature of Learning.....	14
Need for Lifelong Learning Today.....	14
Controversies Over Learning.....	18
Learning Theories.....	21
Behaviorist Theory.....	21
Cognitive Theory.....	23
Humanistic Theory.....	24
Characteristics of Adults as Learners.....	25
Strategies for Fostering Learning.....	27
Knox's Proficiency Theory.....	28
Daloz's Mentoring Strategy.....	29
Wlodkowski and Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn.....	31
Needs Assessment.....	36
Felt Needs, Normative Needs, and Real Needs.....	36
Program Planning.....	38
Approaches to Program Planning.....	39
The Systems Approach Model.....	40
Andragogical Approach.....	41
The Interactive Planning Model.....	42
Evaluation.....	43
Helping Students Learn in Preparation for the Workforce.....	45
Responding to Changes in Demographics and Technology.....	45
Employability Skills.....	47
Summary of the Literature.....	49

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY.....	52
An Overview of the Study.....	52
Background to the Question.....	54
Planning and Organizing the Study.....	54
Phase One: Gathering Support.....	55
Gathering Administration and Faculty Support.....	55
Gathering Student Support.....	57
Conducting the Assessment of Students' Felt Needs.....	57
Phase Two: Gathering Employer Input.....	60
The Employer Survey.....	61
Conducting the Employer Survey.....	62
Differences Resulting from the Distinctions Among Employers...64	
Reviewing the Process of Data Collection from Employers.....65	
Phase Three: Implementation of the Intervention.....	67
Intervention Description.....	67
Planned Learning Outcomes.....	67
Workshop Objectives.....	68
A Review of the Heavy Duty Job Readiness Workshop.....	69
Heavy Duty Workshop Participant Profile.....	69
Setting the Environment.....	70
A Review of the Heavy Duty Workshop Content.....	71
A Review of the Automotive Job Readiness Workshop.....	78
Automotive Workshop Participant Profile.....	79
Differences Between the Two Workshops.....	81
Employer Visits.....	82
Phase Four: Evaluation of the Workshop and Study.....	84
Evaluation Formats.....	84
Participants' Evaluation of the Job Readiness Workshop.....	85
Findings from the Employer Visits to Class.....	87
Community Work Experience Evaluation.....	88
Follow-up with Participants in the Job Readiness Workshop.....	88
Follow-up with Non-participants.....	89
Employer Follow-up Survey.....	91
Survey Method for Employers.....	91
Informal Evaluation.....	93
4. DISCUSSION OF THE OUTCOME: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION.....	96
Workforce Preparedness Literature and My Study.....	97
Needs Assessment.....	98
Significant Program Planning Models.....	104
The Systems Approach Model.....	105
The Interactive Program Planning Model.....	106
Facilitating Effective Learning.....	109

Humanistic Theory.....	109
Operant Conditioning.....	110
Enhanced Motivation.....	111
Evaluation of My Three Research Questions.....	113
Conclusions.....	115
Recommendations for Practice.....	118
Recommendations for Further Research.....	119
REFERENCES.....	121



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Being job ready for the 21st century requires more than simply acquiring specific skills and knowledge. The contemporary workforce demands the ability to respond to rapid change. In addition to demonstrating the capacity to practice skill sets specific to a field of study, the capability to be adaptable, diversified, and willing to engage in continuous learning are the type of qualities that modern day employers need from employees. As Evers, Rush, and Berdrow (1998) explain:

The debate as to whether college graduates should be specialists or generalists is over; they need to be both. Today's college graduates need to possess specialized knowledge and skills plus general skills that will provide them with the ability to adapt to whatever changes come next. It is simply not good enough to be able to access information. Graduates must be able to apply the information to solve problems. (p. 3)

The concept of lifelong learning has gained attention as changes forced by technology impact our personal, work, and educational experiences. Individuals acquire new information through various means in a variety of contexts and for a multitude of reasons. Common to all learning is the engagement of the learner. To be a responsive adult educator in the 21st century, knowledge of the learning process and ways to foster its development are integral to learner success.

This thesis explores my attempt to be a responsive adult educator in the preparation of heavy duty equipment repair truck and transport (referred to hereafter as

heavy duty) students and, automotive service technician (referred to hereafter as automotive) students for a work experience in the community. I developed and implemented two job readiness workshops in a post-secondary educational institution. In this experience, being a responsive educator included identifying students' felt needs, employers' expectations, and integrating these in the delivery of job readiness workshops. Understanding learning theories and ways of fostering learning were paramount for me in developing the design and delivery of these workshops. In addition, consideration of the changing nature of the workforce in my local region was also critical if true responsiveness was to be achieved in my study.

### **Background Information**

As technology increasingly permeates our lives, it often seems, as Heraclitus said, the only constant is change. Cross (1981) describes the need for continuous or lifelong learning and its impact on society in terms of the growth of a learning society. She describes lifelong learning as a means of keeping pace with a fast changing society. As she explains, "It would be difficult to think of some way to live in a society changing so rapidly as ours without constantly learning new things" (p. 1). Lifelong learning has become a fundamental necessity in order to prosper in our new economy. Cross puts this succinctly: "Lifelong learning is not a privilege or a right; it is simply a necessity for anyone, young or old, who must live with the escalating pace of change--in the family, on the job, in the community, and in the world-wide society" (p. xxi).

The Employability Skills Profile (1997) developed by the Corporate Council on Education and the Conference Board of Canada identifies specific skills, attitudes, and behaviors representative of those qualities sought by employers when they are hiring employees. It also outlines what employers look for when training employees.

Academic skills, personal management, and teamwork skills are emphasized in the 1997 Employability Skills Profile along with an advocacy for a much more holistic approach to education than simply demanding skill mastery. The preparation of graduates for employment at the turn of the new millennium means trying to meet the challenge of changing needs of employers and society.

During the time of my research, I worked at Atlantic University College (AUC) (fictitious names for organizations and people are used throughout) in the Atlantic Region. The AUC is a post-secondary institution offering a unique educational service delivery to its community. As a university college, it offers degree, diploma, and trades certification. Preparing students for the world of work is central to its student-centered mandate. Most of the AUC programs that offer a local work experience component also incorporate specific curricula to prepare students for their community work experiences. The majority of these curricula are offered through the services of the Employment Resource Centre, which is centrally located on campus to meet job readiness needs. However, the AUC's trades training division, an integral part of the University College, did not have a curriculum specific to job readiness for its trades students.

As an employee of AUC working in the job readiness area for 10 years, I was very much aware of the value of preparing students for the world of work. Likewise, I was

dismayed by the lack of specific curricula designed to meet the job readiness needs of our trades students. My professional background, in addition to my work at AUC, includes job readiness training facilitation with entry and re-entry women, and job readiness work with women offenders. Throughout these experiences I have developed three fundamental beliefs about preparing individuals for the world of work. First, I believe that providing hands-on assistance to students during their transition toward the workforce is essential for job success. Learning to develop responsive job search tools enhances success. Second, I believe that learning about the workforce beforehand is fundamental to successful job acquisition. As such, inadequate student preparation or no preparation at all for the workforce can result in inadequate performance by even the best students. Finally, I view workforce preparation as an initial step toward critical self assessment, motivation, and confidence building--all fundamental components of continued lifelong learning necessary in the contemporary workforce .

I found that my passion for the empowering nature of job readiness training was shared by many of the trades instructors and the chair of the trades department at AUC. All of us saw the value of job readiness training and we wanted to prove its benefits as an additional component to our trades training curricula.

### **The Problem Statement**

The problem identified for my study was that there was no job readiness component within the trades training programs at AUC to prepare students for their 2-

week community placement work experience. This is of particular significance to students in the heavy duty and automotive pre-employment programs since they are required to seek out their own 2-week community work placement. The questions this study sought to address were the following: First, what are the needs of the trades students in the trades education department of AUC and what are the job readiness expectations of prospective employers in the region? Second, how can I, as an adult educator, plan a job readiness program for AUC trades students that addresses these diverse needs? Third, how can I facilitate such a job readiness program for AUC trades students? Specific variables were identified and measured as a means for providing empirical data to address the research questions. Through my study, it became apparent that the validity of the answer to the research questions depended largely on the legitimacy of the study methodology used. In order to be student-centered, I identified the students' felt needs. To be employer-responsive, I solicited employers' expectations and I included them in the curricula. Finally, to measure and evaluate the success in this study, I analyzed the results of the study against a comparison student trades group from AUC, I used comparative data to assess attitudinal change, and I also utilized data from employers to gain a third level of evaluation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

To address the question of whether or not the trades department at AUC should incorporate a job readiness component into its existing curriculum, I first had to answer

more immediate issues. As a researcher, I hypothesized that a job readiness component could be added to the trades training curriculum if the following conditions existed:

(a) if pre-employment instructors, the chair of the trades department, and the pre-employment trades students expressed and supported a need for a job readiness curriculum, (b) if relevant employers identified student job readiness skills as part of their expectations when hiring new employees, and (c) if there was evidence that AUC students would benefit from participating in job readiness training.

I first assessed the instructors' and department chair's support for a job readiness curriculum by conducting individual interviews with them. I then conducted a needs assessment with some of the pre-employment trades students as a means of soliciting student input. I then identified employers' expectations through interviews with local employers. I found support for the study at all three levels.

I engaged in evaluation at the end of each workshop using a structured evaluation form with space for additional comments. I conducted summative evaluations of the entire study in three ways after students completed their 2-week work experience requirement. First, I received feedback from students who attended my workshops and, second, I received comments from a comparison group of students who did not attend my workshops. Third, I received feedback from employers who supervised my students during their community work experience. These three sources of data were triangulated along with the data I had in my own reflective journal.

Most of my time spent on this study was around planning and evaluation. By comparison, the time spent on implementation was minor. It was this planning and

evaluation work that enhanced my study, but it also proved to be the most valuable learning that came out of this study for me as the researcher. The personal learning goals I set for myself in the study included developing existing research skills, gaining knowledge of program planning and learning more about the required job readiness skills of the contemporary workforce, achieving a comfort level in facilitating diverse learners, and acquiring the ability to motivate learners. I believe each of these was met and, as will be discussed in chapter 4, I believe the study was successful.

### **The Design of the Study**

Atlantic University College is home to five pre-employment trades training programs, including heavy duty, automotive, motor vehicle body repairer, industrial mechanical and millwright, and the machinist program. My study focused on two of the five programs: heavy duty and automotive. The industrial mechanical and millwright, and the machinist programs served as the comparison group during the evaluation stage of the study. Students in the motor vehicle body repairer program completed their 2-week work placement differently in 1999 and, as such, did not serve as an appropriate comparison group. The entire study proposal and supporting documentation was first presented in application form to the Atlantic University College Ethics Review Committee according to the University College application procedures. Approval was granted before I engaged in any aspect of the study.

The department chair played an active role throughout the entire study, as did the instructor for the heavy duty program. The instructor for the automotive program changed twice throughout the implementation of the study. This somewhat complicated my plan since I was required to introduce each new instructor to my research and request his participation. Students' felt needs were identified through questionnaires completed by the students in the heavy duty class and the automotive class. Forty-four of 45 students completed needs assessment surveys; the one, and only, female student participated. One student chose not to participate and expressed this by leaving the class immediately after I explained the purpose of my survey.

I identified the employers' job readiness expectations through individual interviews that I conducted with 20 local employers, 10 of whom were relevant to the heavy duty trade, and 10 of whom were relevant to the automotive trade. I conducted 19 of 20 interviews in person and one interview over the telephone. I chose employers according to their location so that travel was limited and expenses were minimal. I conducted two, 1-day job readiness workshops, one for the heavy duty class and one for the automotive class. In addition, two employers from each of these trades visited the classes as an extension of the workshops. They described a typical day at their place of work, described their expectations when hiring, and answered students' questions. Of a potential of 41 students, 35 attended my job readiness workshops.

Gender played a role in the composition of my study. Of the 35 students who attended my workshop, one automotive student was female. As a facilitator, this made me more aware of being gender inclusive in my language. This also generated dialogue



during the automotive workshop that did not arise in the heavy duty workshop. In particular, this student questioned whether or not an employer would have the same expectations of her as her male counterpart. My own female gender impacted the study. Eighteen of 20 employers interviewed were male. On occasion, employers seemed surprised when I dropped in unexpectedly to inquire about their expectations when hiring technicians. This fact played a role in my decision to schedule interviews so that employers anticipated my arrival well in advance.

### **Scope and Limitations**

I designed the study to measure the value of adding a job readiness component to a trades training curriculum. I did not seek to develop a program that might be useful in an institution of higher education with a more gender diverse trades student population. Moreover, this study was with only two trades programs and, therefore, the scope did not include degree or diploma programs within AUC.

Only one female was enrolled in any of the 5 pre-employment trades at Atlantic University College. She willingly participated in the research; however, the data collected represent a male-dominated student sample. This may be seen as a limitation.

Upon completion of the 2-week community work experience, I sent surveys to 24 employers who supervised my workshop participants. The purpose of my survey was to gain employer feedback regarding my students' job readiness. I may have limited my data by having employers evaluate only one criterion; the students' job readiness. In

retrospect, I could have developed another employer survey that asked employers to evaluate the job readiness of my students compared to the job readiness of someone simply walking in off the street in search of employment. This might be seen as a limitation as well.

One instructor invited me to hand out my surveys minutes before the students were scheduled to write a test. In so doing, my presence and the resulting postponement of the test may have caused some anxiety among survey participants. The timing was not appropriate in this case and this too may be a limitation. Prior to the job readiness workshops, I interviewed 20 local employers in our maritime community. These employers were representative of the trades I was working with. However, the sample is limited to the community involved and may not apply to other communities of different sizes, regions, or those with major economic differences. Finally, during one of the job readiness workshops, one instructor remained in the workshop as a participant. While his dialogue added to the content of the workshop, his presence may have restricted some discussion among participants.

### **Assumptions**

I assumed that my past experiences as a job readiness facilitator were adequate to facilitating the job readiness workshops. Second, I assumed that the learning experience offered in my job readiness workshops was sufficient to presume that those who attended could be job ready for their work experience. I also assumed that attendees of the job

readiness workshops would transfer their learning when they participated in their work placement experience. In fact, this assumption proved to be only partially accurate when data were collected after the work experience. Fourth, I assumed that data collected from employers involved in the study were representative of the respective trades locally. Finally, I assumed I was sufficiently unbiased, due to my past experience and education as a master's student, to effectively analyze and interpret the data collected.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms used throughout this thesis may require explanation. These are used consistently throughout all four chapters.

Atlantic University College (AUC) is a post-secondary institution that offers educational programming including bachelor degrees in liberal arts, business, and science. Diplomas in engineering and business technology as well as trades training certification are also offered.

The Trades Department at Atlantic University College includes academic training for the following apprenticeship trades: automotive service technician (referred to in this thesis as “automotive”), heavy duty equipment repair for truck and transport (referred to in this thesis as “heavy duty”), motor vehicle body repairer, industrial mechanical and millwright, and machinist training.

The Pre-Employment Program at Atlantic University College is an academic program of study for students interested in beginning a career in an apprenticable trade. At AUC, it

includes 8 months of academic study focused on government standards. Upon successful completion, a student is eligible to write an exam toward the achievement of Block II Apprenticeship. The pre-employment program also includes a 2-week work experience component.

Work Experience in this thesis refers to a 2-week on-the-job training requirement, which is a mandatory component of the pre-employment trades program at AUC. In the second semester at AUC, pre-employment students are required to volunteer with an employer who holds journeyman status in a related trade. Usually, in three of the five pre-employment trades, students are required to *secure their own* work experience. In the remaining two trades, work experience opportunities are secured by the appropriate instructor. The terms work experience, community work experience, and work placement are used interchangeably throughout this thesis.

Job Readiness Skills Curriculum refers to a curriculum containing information relevant to the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for a successful job search. In this particular study, job readiness skills include the preparation of a cover letter and a resume, demonstrated job search techniques, interview skills, and a general understanding of employer expectations.

A Felt Need as described by Boyle (1981) refers to “something believed necessary by the individual concerned” (p. 142-43).

Study Group in this thesis refers to a group of individuals who receive a service or study treatment.

Control Group in this thesis refers to a comparison group. It means a group that does not receive a particular study treatment, or service, and this provides a point of comparison.

### **Plan of Presentation**

Following this introductory chapter, chapter 2 presents an exploration and synthesis of the relevant literature. I first examine literature specific to learning and adult education because the concept of learning constitutes the theme around which my study was designed. I then discuss the need for lifelong learning followed by controversies over defining learning. Next, I examine strategies for fostering effective learning including proficiency theory, mentoring, and enhanced motivation. I then discuss a systematic approach to program planning with particular attention given to evaluation. Finally, I review the contemporary workforce literature that directly relates to the learning needs of people entering the workforce.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed presentation of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of my study. Chapter 4 is an analysis and interpretation of my study including implications, conclusions, and recommendations.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

In this chapter, I review literature relevant to learning and adult education. I review the uniqueness of adult learning and the need for lifelong learning. I describe controversies over various ways of defining learning, including understanding learning from three theoretical perspectives. I then discuss ways of fostering adult learning. I describe needs assessment as a means of identifying felt, normative, and real needs. I define approaches to program planning with an emphasis on planning for evaluation and, finally, I explore the demands of the contemporary workforce as a way of understanding the elements necessary in planning programs to prepare students for the world of work.

#### **The Nature of Learning**

In this section I present a broad overview of learning. I emphasize the need for lifelong learning today within the context of a growing learning society. I define learning from a variety of perspectives and theories with particular emphasis on the adult learner.

#### **Need For Lifelong Learning Today**

The need for continuous learning dominates society today as it never has before. According to Knowles (1980), the concept of lifelong learning is central to all education as it is a means for keeping pace with a changing world. He contends that “the premise

underlying this line of thought is that in a world of accelerating change learning must be a lifelong process” (p. 19). Lifelong learning is central to being prepared to meet the demands of an ever changing workforce. Just a generation ago, skill and knowledge acquisition could serve an employee for decades, but contemporary members of the workforce are destined to engage in on-going skill and knowledge development in order to respond to societal changes. Cross (1981) notes:

The speed of change affects not only the lives of individuals but also the way in which society handles education. Instead of parents’ passing what they have learned to their children, children today must learn lessons never known by their parents. It is the rare child who learns the skills for his or her livelihood from parents. (pp. 28-29)

Selman and Dampier (1991) reiterate Cross’s emphasis on the impact of change on the education system. They describe the effect as follows:

The belief that one can be educated for a lifetime within the first twenty years or so of one’s life no longer prevails as a defensible idea in formal education. From the point of view of the individual, the rapidity, extent and omnipresence of change have virtually eliminated the grounds for being complacent about learning beyond one’s formal education. (p. 96)

Cross (1981) believes that there are three influences affecting the growth of lifelong learning today and, thus, the growth of the learning society: technology, demographics, and social change. Technological change permeates our education system, our workforce, and our home lives. To master a skill means only the ability to apply it in its most recent technological form and to assume the same approach will remain current for any extended period of time is naive. Cross describes the impact of demographics on our learning society by exploring the effect of the baby boom generation who, by sheer numbers, affect education, government, and industry. As she

notes, in the United States, “by the year 2000, the largest age group will be 30 to 44 year olds, with a rising curve for 45 to 64 year olds” (p. 3). An increase in the adult population places increasing demands on adult education as this large cohort engages in competition for their places in the workforce. Cross explains that “some career ladders have become severely congested, forcing people to look at a number of possible alternatives, all of which have ramifications for adult education” (p. 6). Forced and chosen career changes, finding fulfillment through new hobbies and lifelong learning, or continued learning as a means of remaining competitive in one’s career, are all examples of changes that directly impact workplace learning, adult education, and society as a whole.

In describing some of the social changes impacting lifelong learning, Cross explains the concepts of the linear, cycle, and blended life plans. She describes the linear plan as one that allots time for education, work, and leisure at separate and distinct times throughout the life span. In this life plan, she says: “The result over time has been the compression of work activities into the middle years of life; nonwork time has increased substantially in the earlier and later years” (p. 10). By contrast, the cycle life plan refers to education, work, and leisure across the life span in segments of allotted time. This is a life plan known in Europe as recurrent education and, in fact, some European governments encourage workers to take time off for education and for leisure time through national policies (Cross, 1981). Akin to this approach is the blended life plan. It blends participation in work, education, and leisure concurrently. This is the North American model. As Cross says: “Higher education in the United States may soon



consist of a majority of learners who have adopted a blended life plan” (p. 12). Clearly, the need for lifelong learning will only increase as will the need for adults to adapt to this growing need.

Candy (1991) concurs with Cross and her emphasis on the need for lifelong learning. He explores lifelong learning through the process of self-directed learning. Candy views lifelong learning as a way of equipping individuals with the ability to continue knowledge and skill attainment as they seek to respond to rapid social and technological change. In addition to the personal benefits derived from fostering lifelong, self-directed learning endeavors through adult education, Candy describes the ripple effect to follow: “Into the bargain, it has been asserted that creating ‘self-directed learners’ will improve the quality of democratic participation, and ultimately the quality of life, because self-directed learners must inevitably become more self-determining citizens” (p. xiii).

It is evident that lifelong learning is a necessary and a fundamental component of a healthy, productive society. As argued in the literature, those engaged in lifelong learning are more fulfilled as they maintain pace with a changing world. Yet, as Cunningham (1988) argues, to view this trend uncritically would be to abandon the very foundation upon which it is built. She gives warning that the lifelong learning trend carries certain dangers, including the danger that all adult learning will become institutionally packaged, and commodified:

More subtle, and perhaps far more intrusive, is the social pressure exerted covertly within the culture as a norm. Thus, phrases such as “learning never ends,” “the learning society,” and “lifelong learning,” which in and by themselves

appear harmless, become changed to unconscious normative imperatives regarding institutional education. The notion that one should be involved in institutionalized education as a lifelong pursuit becomes an internalized “ought” and thus subconsciously detracts from the voluntary nature of the educational activity. (p. 141)

It is important, therefore, that the notion of lifelong learning encompasses both individual and societal growth as derived from learning encounters.

### Controversies Over Learning

Given the scope of adult education, it is not surprising that there exists an extensive diversity in the definitions of the learning process. The perspective of an educator, the mandate of an institution, the influences of the learning environment, and the needs of the learner all play significant roles in creating the learning process. Selman and Dampier (1991) make an important distinction between adult education and adult learning. They state: “Learning is the intended end-product of education. Much, if not most of adult learning in our society takes place outside of our education institutions and the programs which they offer” (p. 4). Therefore, the concept of learning can be as vast as the myriad contexts in which it exists.

The concept of adult learning has a fascinating history dating back to at least the times of Plato and Aristotle, and continues to intrigue contemporary theorists today. Grattan (1971) traces the history of adult education and describes the Greeks’ search for knowledge as their means of achieving moral and intellectual excellence. He describes the difficulty of legitimately documenting adult learning because “until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century it is hardly possible to identify and discuss institutions which, by intent, were designed for the education of adults” (pp. 22-23). Merriam and Caffarella (1991) state:

“Originally, learning was within the purview of philosophical investigations into the nature of knowledge, the human mind, and what it means to know” (p. 123). They add that, much later, the study of learning expanded its parameters: “It was not until the nineteenth century that the study of the mind, of how people know, and, by extension, of behavior, became ‘scientifically’ investigated” (p. 124). Merriam and Caffarella go on to explore the complexities of learning definitions:

A common definition from psychologists, especially those who were investigating the phenomenon until the 1950s, is that learning is a change in behavior. This definition, however, fails to capture some of the complexities involved—such as whether one needs to perform in order for learning to have occurred or whether all human behavior is learned. (p. 124)

The concept of learning becomes even less absolute when learning is measured not only by observable change in behavior, but when the capability to change behavior exists.

Merriam and Caffarella note that “the notion of change still underlies most definitions of learning, although it has been modified to include the potential for change (p. 124).

The complexity of defining learning is extended when a particular learning theory is applied to the learning transaction. As will be discussed later, learning theory orientations define learning according to different criteria. Behaviorists define learning as a change in behavior, cognitivists define learning as the thinking process involved in analyzing and retrieving stimuli, and humanists define learning from a holistic, student-centered perspective whereby learning occurs at the point when learners are fully engaged in reaching their true potential. While behaviorism, cognitivism, and humanism are the three more common learning theories, Merriam (1988) notes: “Some writers have added other categories to their organization including neobehaviorism, structuralism,

developmentalism, or psychoanalysis” (p. 5). Thus, defining learning continues to grow in complexity and diversity.

Knowles (1980) describes the difference between defining learning as an external, as compared to an internal, process. When learning is defined as an external process, he says, it is concerned with the result of transmitting information. In the external, he understands “learning as an almost exclusively intellectual process consisting of the storing of accumulated facts in the filing drawers of the mind” (p. 55). From this perspective, external forces such as the teacher’s delivery or the teaching materials shape the learning. However, Knowles goes on to say that “a growing body of research into what really happens when learning takes place has put this traditional conception of learning in serious jeopardy” (p. 55). The internal process, he says, is learner centered “including intellectual, emotional, and physiological functions” (p. 56). The internal-external debate around learning continues to dominate much of the adult education teaching and program planning literature (Caffarella, 1994).

Clearly, defining learning is a complex endeavor. Boucouvalas and Krupp (1989) state: “Adult development and learning, then, require a multidisciplinary understanding. Moreover, learning, when broadly defined, approaches synonymity with development, but in narrower terms takes on the character of acquiring information, knowledge, skills, attitude, and wisdom” (p. 184).

I believe that what matters is not the attainment of agreement on a universally accepted definition but, rather, the acceptance that learning does not exist in a vacuum; cannot be measured by using a single methodology; exists throughout the life span; and

impacts individual, societal, and economic growth. Defining learning in adult education also requires an understanding of learning theories.

### Learning Theories

The study of adult education encompasses diversity with respect to participants, contexts, and foundations. Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) explore the myriad issues inherent in a practice encompassing such versatility. They note that “there exists no single conceptual framework, no single set of basic assumptions and principles from which all educators view the field” (p. 35). They also contend that it is not likely that a single learning perspective will emerge as long as adult education continues to reflect our pluralistic society. In light of this diversity, this section explores three learning theories relevant to the study of adult education, including behaviorism, cognitivism, and humanism.

Behaviorist theory. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1991), the study of behaviorism began in the early 1900s and is most commonly associated with Thorndike’s stimulus-response theory, and Skinner’s concept of operant conditioning. Merriam and Caffarella describe Thorndike’s contribution to learning theory as follows: “Using animals in controlled experiments, Thorndike noted that through repeated trial-and-error learning, certain connections between sensory impressions or stimuli (S) and subsequent behavior or responses (R) are strengthened or weakened by the consequences of behavior” (p. 126). Behaviorism is further defined as operant conditioning with the use of reinforcement. As Merriam and Caffarella explain: “Reinforcement is essential to understanding operant conditioning. If behavior is reinforced or rewarded, the response

is more likely to occur again under like conditions. Behavior that is not reinforced is likely to become less frequent and may even disappear” (p. 127).

Behaviorist theory has been central to the practice of education and training for generations. Merriam and Caffarella contend that “the systematic design of instruction, behavioral objectives, notions of the instructor’s accountability, programmed instruction, computer-assisted instruction, competency-based education, and so on are solidly grounded in behavioral learning theory” (p. 128). The role of the educator in fostering adult learning from a behaviorist perspective is in terms of controlling the learning environment to achieve desired goals. In behaviorism, Merriam and Caffarella say that “the teacher’s role is to design an environment that elicits desired behavior toward meeting these goals and to extinguish behavior that is not desirable” (p. 128).

Brookfield (1989) describes behaviorism in an educational setting as follows:

The assumption behind the behaviorist paradigm is that the facilitator’s task is to ensure that learners attain previously defined learning objectives, many of which are specified in terms of clearly observable, behavioral outcomes. Learning activities are sequenced so that learners move through a series of carefully designed, progressively complex operations. The educational activity is evaluated as successful to the extent that the previously defined learning objectives are demonstrably achieved. (p. 202)

He contends that this approach to education is best suited to an environment where objectives are clear, where accomplishment of such objectives can be judged against agreed upon criteria of success, and where there is a clear distinction between teacher and learner expertise.

Cross (1981) supports the contextual appropriateness of a behaviorist approach to fostering adult learning in certain situations. She notes:

Programmed instruction, computer-assisted instruction, personalized systems of instruction (PSI) and other applications of behaviorism have been growing rapidly in traditional education . . . and their convenience for off-campus learners plus their general effectiveness with well-motivated, self-disciplined adults makes them likely candidates for growth in adult education as well. (p. 233)

It seems, therefore, that behaviorism in adult education is particularly useful in vocational adult education. Cross notes that “behaviorism is frequently the foundation for one of the largest segments of adult education, namely job and skills training” (p. 232).

Cognitive theory. Merriam and Caffarella (1991) explain cognitive theory, also known as information-processing theory, as having grown out of a reaction to behaviorism and the search for a more holistic approach to understanding learning. Cognitivism, they say, moves beyond the concept of stimuli-induced responses. The interest in cognitivism is an interest in what is involved when meaning is attached to processes, and when the learner is engaged in thinking. In this learning theory, learning is no longer solely the result of the learner’s environment. Merriam and Caffarella describe the evolution of cognitive theory throughout the mid to late 1900s. Gestalt psychologists of the mid-1900s opposed behaviorism and put an emphasis on perception, insight, and meaning within the learning process. Later, cognitive theory was considered from combined behaviorist and cognitive perspectives and, subsequently, other theorists explored the processes of cognitive learning in new learning situations. Learning how to learn (Smith, 1982) and learning throughout adulthood (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991) became the new trend for cognitivists. Merriam and Caffarella conclude that “cognitively oriented explanations of learning encompass a wide range of topics. What

unites these various approaches is the focus on internal mental processes that are within the learner's control" (p. 131).

Humanistic theory. The learning theory some (e.g., Daloz, 1986; Knowles, 1980) say is the most closely aligned to adult education principles is humanism. It encapsulates student-centeredness and a firm belief in learners' growth potential. Merriam and Caffarella (1991) discuss the contributions of Maslow (1970) and Rogers (1983) to the understanding of human needs and motivation in this theory which leads to personal growth and development. Rogers's theory emphasizes the importance of learner-centeredness in learning. Maslow's hierarchy of needs describes an understanding of motivation when an individual sequentially meets basic to more complex needs. According to Maslow, the ultimate need is self-actualization. Merriam and Caffarella state: "The motivation to learn is intrinsic; it emanates from the learner. For Maslow self-actualization is the goal of learning and educators should strive to bring this about" (p. 133).

In Candy's (1991) explanation of humanistic education, he describes the humanistic approach as one with a view to exploring the goodness in people. He explains that early humanists studied people in their natural surrounding and "as a result, they formulated a more complete, comprehensive, and compassionate view of individual human performance" (p. 40). Brookfield (1989) describes the assumptions underpinning the practice of humanism as follows:

The activity of facilitating learning is conceived as being essentially collaborative, with strong emphasis on learners and teachers negotiating objectives, methods, and evaluative criteria. Facilitators in this tradition respect



the integrity of learners and grant learners' interests and demands a great deal of validity. (p. 203)

Furthermore, Cross (1981) conceptualizes the idea that “humanists assume that there is a natural tendency for people to learn and that learning will flourish if nourishing, encouraging environments are provided” (p. 228). Accordingly, in the humanist tradition, it is the role of the responsive educator to provide an environment conducive to learning as a means of facilitating the learner’s growth potential.

In order for an educator to be truly responsive to the learning needs of an individual, an understanding of the uniqueness of adult learners is imperative. The next section will explore some of the major characteristics of adult learners.

#### Characteristics of Adults as Learners

Much has been written on adult characteristics in adult education (e.g., Knox, 1986; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). Knowles (1980) presents a foundational humanist model of teaching that he terms andragogy. It illuminates four characteristics that distinguish adults from children in their learning and provides reasons why one should teach adults differently from children. The four assumptions include the notions that 1) self-directedness increases with maturity, 2) that life experience is a valuable learning resource, 3) that adults are eager to learn relevant to their social roles, and 4) that adult learners are interested in knowledge acquisition that they perceive to be immediately applicable.

Cross (1981), in her Characteristics of Adults as Learners (CAL) model, gives two classes of characteristics: personal characteristics and situational characteristics.

Personal characteristics refer to a continuum of descriptors related to the learner including physiological (aging), sociocultural (life phases), and psychological (developmental stages). Situational characteristics are defined as dichotomies describing the conditions under which the learning is taking place including, part-time versus full-time learning, and voluntary versus compulsory learning. As Cross explains, personal and situational characteristics account for differences in learning in adulthood from learning in childhood.

The CAL model provides a framework for understanding the significance of timing on the learning choices made by adults. As Cross explains, aging factors, life phases, and both chosen and serendipitous social contexts can determine the rationale for an adult's engagement in learning. From a developmental perspective, Cross suggests that understanding each personal characteristic described in the CAL model is a means of being a responsive educator. In this model, an adult educator can create an environment conducive to learning by responding to a learner's personal characteristics. For instance, Cross states, in relation to being responsive to aging factors, that "the physiological continuum calls for an educational stance that is largely adaptive and adjustive" (p. 239). A program planner who considers the physiological stages of adult learners may plan to use participants' life experiences as integral to program content. Furthermore, an adult educator's understanding of the sociocultural continuum offers an opportunity to capitalize on teachable moments. As Cross concludes:

Because the greatest opportunities for learning occur at transition points, the educator's stance on this dimension is adjustive in the sense that educators who

understand the life phase being left behind and the one to come can design learning experiences to aid in the transition to a new phase of the life cycle. (p. 240)

With regard to the educator's role in responding to the psychological continuum, Cross states: "My personal evaluation of the theory and research convinces me that the role of the educator on this continuum of CAL should be described as *challenger*"

(p. 240). She describes her rationale as follows:

If one accepts a hierarchy of developmental stages, and if one believes that the role of educators is to help each individual develop to the highest possible level, then the role of educators is to challenge the learner to move to increasingly advanced stages of personal development. This may mean creating the motivation for learning through making the learner uncomfortable in her present assumptions. She is thus forced to examine her present assumptions and to redefine and reshape them at increasingly higher levels of development. (p. 240)

In sum, responsive adult education can foster learning when adult educators utilize knowledge of adult learning characteristics to accommodate, stimulate, and motivate adult learners. Understanding learning and appreciating its place in adult education is imperative to facilitating adult learning in contemporary society.

### **Strategies for Fostering Learning**

To this point, this review has identified the need for lifelong learning, discussed some of the major controversies around learning, described three learning theories, and explored the uniqueness of adults as learners. Putting some of these points into practice typically leads to strategies for ways to foster adult learning. While the adult education

literature is replete with strategies for teaching and fostering learning, following are three of the most significant in the literature.

### Knox's Proficiency Theory

Knox (1986) gives a theory for understanding the rationale for why adults learn, and terms it proficiency theory. It is based on the principles of behaviorism. This theory postulates that adults engage in learning because there exists a discrepancy between current and desired proficiencies. Proficiency theory offers a guide to adult educators to help them be responsive to learners' needs. As Knox explains: "The most valuable information you can obtain in order to help adults learn is about their pertinent current proficiencies (knowledge, skills, attitudes)" (p. 6). Knox further states that "a developmental perspective helps explain how adults acquire their learning style, what prompts learning activities, and how teaching style can both accommodate learning style and guide its further evolution" (p. 21).

Knox (1977) identifies the impact of situational characteristics on learning in his reference to interrelationships between the learner and the context of the learner's life. He sums up the significance of this impact on adult learning as follows: "Understanding the impact of societal contexts on adult development can help practitioners comprehend the stimuli that adults of various ages perceive, just as understanding the physiological trends of adulthood can help them comprehend adult responses" (p. 15). Knox states that "most of adult learning occurs outside educational institutions" (p. 5). For this reason, he supports the need for an understanding of adult learning development. He contends that a better understanding of adult learning development will enhance an adult

educators' ability to foster learning and he summarizes the potential of an effective learning encounter as follows:

From the first session to the last, the teaching/learning transaction is the dynamic core of helping adults learn. The satisfaction that you and participants gain from the program experience depends on how you use questions and examples, provide practice opportunities, sequence activities for progression, pace the program, give positive reinforcement, and allow for program evaluation that provides useful feedback to you and to participants. (1986, p. 8-9)

Proficiency theory can be an invaluable perspective for fostering adult learning.

As Knox states: "Most adults can learn almost anything they want to if they are willing to devote enough time and attention and if they receive some assistance" (p. 21).

### Daloz's Mentoring Strategy

Daloz (1986) approaches the facilitation of adult learning from a humanistic perspective. He uses mentoring as a facilitation strategy:

For when the aim of education is understood to be the development of the whole person--rather than knowledge acquisition, for instance--the central element of good teaching becomes the provision of care rather than use of teaching skills or transmission of knowledge. (p. xvii)

Daloz describes the role of a mentor in adult education as a guide on an educational journey. He depicts the mentor's task as one requiring an understanding of the individual goals of students and as responsive formulation of instruction to assist in the achievement of such goals. He argues that a mentor acts as a catalyst to spark internally induced transitions. Daloz says there are connections to transition stages in adult development that align mentoring with developmental theory: "Rather than see intelligence as a fixed condition, developmentalists suggest that we all have the potential to evolve toward increasingly integrated and differentiated ways of making sense of the

world” (p. 48). From a developmental perspective, it is the role of the mentor to effectively guide this evolution, according to Daloz.

Daloz contends that an understanding of the directions of growth throughout the life span allows a mentor to facilitate such growth. A significant perspective inherent in the concept of mentorship is the notion that mentors facilitate growth, as opposed to merely transferring information. Mentors empower students to engage in critical reflection and evaluation as they make conscious choices about directions in their development. He states that “insights always shine brightest for those who have them, that truth is a word we give to a pattern that makes sense to us” (p. 23).

Daloz argues that while mentors teach in the traditional sense of the word by providing information, giving advice, and then testing the outcomes, mentorship also requires a more in-depth teaching investment:

Yet if we are serious when we assert that education is most successful when students “grow”, that it is intellectual development we are about rather than simple knowledge acquisition, then the evidence is strong that emotional engagement must be a part of the learning process. The recognition that passion is central to learning and the capacity to provide emotional support when it is needed are hallmarks that distinguish the good mentor from the mediocre teacher. (pp. 32-33)

As Daloz says, mentors represent what lies ahead for the protégé in an educational context. They can be living symbols of accomplishment in what can be viewed as a terrifying, unknown future challenge for the adult student. Mentors can embody wisdom for the student, but both mentor and protégé must be aware that the origin of growth belongs to the learner, for “no human being can be a source, and for either mentor or

protégé to believe as much is to lead the journey dangerously astray or abort it altogether” (p. 30).

As a caveat, Daloz reminds adult educators that we see only a segment of the developmental journey of our students and must broaden our perspective to include where they have come from and where they may go. He states:

Because stage changes take years to accomplish, we generally see our students only during brief sections of their passages. Our task is not to peg them into particular stages but rather to see them in their movement and to help them understand what may lie ahead. (p. 68)

#### Wlodkowski and Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn

Understanding the concept of motivation and how it applies to adult learning is another critical aspect in fostering learning. Motivation in education is concerned with whether or not adults want to learn and directly impacts the learning encounter for both instructor and learner. Wlodkowski (1993) explains strategies for motivating learners premised on the humanistic notion that all individuals are motivated. He argues that motivation is not an either-or state of being. By enhancing motivation through effective facilitation, the desired outcomes for both the student and the instructor are more likely to be attained.

There is much controversy surrounding the concept of motivation because it is not tangible and cannot be measured. However, Wlodkowski notes:

Most psychologists concerned with learning and education use the word motivation to describe those processes that can (a) arouse and instigate behavior, (b) give direction or purpose to behavior, (c) continue to allow behavior to persist, and (d) lead to choosing or preferring a particular behavior. (p. 2)

As has been seen, understanding behavior and incorporating such into approaches to helping adults learn is key to being an effective adult educator.

Wlodkowski discusses a youth study conducted by Uguroglu and Walberg in 1979 which provided a macro-analysis of 637,000 students in 40 studies with 232 correlations of motivation and academic learning. The study results indicated that 98% of the correlation between motivation and academic achievement were positive. However, more important to adult motivation were results which showed that motivation to learn in an academic setting increased with age. In support of this theory, Wlodkowski turns to other sources to define the adult learner's approach to learning opportunities and says: "It can be generalized, therefore, that adults by definition, learning theory, and social research are responsible people who seek to build their self-esteem through pragmatic learning activities in which their competence is enhanced" (p. 6). This is fundamentally a humanistic position.

In planning for responsive education, Wlodkowski suggests there are four cornerstones of excellence for a motivating instructor, which include: expertise, empathy, enthusiasm, and clarity (p. 17). He suggests that expertise motivates learners because it signals to the learner that the instructor has something beneficial to offer. In addition, he believes that expertise allows the instructor to be more flexible in the context of teaching and, thus, more responsive. Empathy enhances motivation because, by seeing through the eyes of the learner, the instructor is better able to define and respond to the learner's needs. Enthusiasm motivates by sheer osmosis. As he explains, an enthusiastic educator stimulates enthusiasm within learners. Finally, clarity contributes to motivation in that it



ensures that information is understandable and organized--aspects that are significant to the notion that individuals learn what they understand. Wlodkowski offers a note of encouragement to instructors with his belief that these characteristics are not necessarily innate. He notes that "as instructors, our most advantageous approach to these building blocks is to see them as skills and not as abstractions or personality traits. They can be learned and they can be improved upon through practice and effort" (p. 17).

Since there is no single theory of motivation, Wlodkowski uses strategies from numerous motivational theories to illustrate what he views to be the six major factors that impact motivation: attitudes, needs, stimulation, affect, competence, and reinforcement (p. 45). Attitudes impact motivation because attitudes affect behavior, and behavior affects learning. As Wlodkowski notes:

Attitudes are powerful influences on human behavior and learning because they help people make sense of their world and give cues as to what behavior will be most helpful in dealing with that world . . . . Attitudes help us to feel safe around things that are initially unknown to us. Attitudes also help us to anticipate and cope with recurrent events. (p. 46)

Since attitudes are learned predispositions resulting from experience, attitudes can be changed as the result of experience. It is, therefore, the role of an effective educator to be attentive to the variety of predispositions that adults bring to learning encounters as the result of life experiences and be aware of their impact on individual learning.

Wlodkowski also describes needs. Needs, as he explains it, are internal forces pushing a person toward a general goal. When the need is strong, it is often accompanied by pressure to achieve the goal. When needing to achieve the goal is combined with wanting to achieve the goal, there exists a desire for achievement. As Wlodkowski says:

When adults need and desire what they are learning, they will tend to be highly motivated. Instructors can influence motivation based on need by being sensitive to apparent needs and by formulating how and what they present to adult learners in a manner that gratifies those needs. (p. 48)

Wlodkowski says that adult educators can foster adult learning by appreciating learners' needs and desires. He believes that adult educators "can intensify the adults' desire for learning by applying motivational strategies that enhance what the learners want to acquire through their participation" (p. 49).

Wlodkowski defines stimulation, his third major factor, as "any change in our perception or experience with our environment that makes us active" (p. 51).

Stimulation is significant to learning in that if a learner is not drawn to instruction, boredom sets in and attention is lured away from the learning activity. Stimulation is important to adult learners. As was seen in Cross's (1981) CAL model, education is seldom the sole responsibility of adult learners and, thus, there are numerous other stimuli for which attention can be demanded in the learning process.

Wlodkowski's fourth factor is emotion. Understanding the impact of emotions on learning is also important, he says, because "no learning takes place in a vacuum. Learners feel something while learning, and those emotions can motivate their behavior in a number of different directions" (1993, p. 52). Wlodkowski describes the impact emotion has on adult education as follows:

Because adult learning so often deals with success and failure in achievement and accomplishment activities, the personal feelings of these learners are continually rampant as they react to their progress or lack of it. The emotional state of an adult at a particular instance of learning is a significant influence. (p. 53)

A responsive instructor will utilize emotional affect to optimize learning encounters.

According to Wlodkowski, planning opportunities for students to develop competency is another consideration for instructors when they are trying to create environments to foster adult learning. Wlodkowski describes competence as “the concept or major motivational factor that describes our innate desire to take the initiative and effectively act upon our environment rather than remaining passive and allowing the environment to control and determine our behavior” (p. 55). Competence affects learning when individuals feel a sense of accomplishment and are motivated to continue. Competence directly affects self-confidence in that self-confidence is increased each time a feeling of self-driven accomplishment is realized. This, in turn, leads to more learning and further competence, which increases self-confidence. It is the instructor’s role to create environments conducive to competency and self-confidence building, according to Wlodkowski.

Wlodkowski’s notion of reinforcement, the sixth and final factor, emulates behaviorist learning theory. This point is premised on the notion that learners display behaviors to elicit responses from instructors, and those behaviors that receive positive reinforcement continue while those that receive negative reinforcement diminish. Positive reinforcers which exist in learning environments include good grades, high test scores, awards, and instructor attention. Negative reinforcers include penalties, disapproval from the instructor, or threats. While careful use of positive reinforcers can be effective, use of negative reinforcers, according to Wlodkowski, is potentially dangerous. He explains that, “in general, adults in this culture do not respond well when

they know or feel their learning is coerced. Consequently, their motivation for learning under such conditions tends to diminish over time” (p. 58).

Wlodkowski suggests that while all motivational factors will not have the same effect on all learners, planning for the use of motivational strategies can be key to effectively engaging students in learning encounters as a means of helping them fulfill their learning potential.

In summary, understanding the potential for using strategies for fostering learning and the nature of learners’ motivation can lead to an enhancement of the learning transaction. The next section explores the program planning process and serves to complement the literature on fostering learning in adult education.

### **Needs Assessment**

The adult education program planning literature devotes considerable attention to needs assessment and presents it as a central component of program planning.

Fundamental to most of these models is involving learners in the planning process, particularly in the identification of their felt needs. However, learner needs are not the only consideration in needs assessment, as seen next.

#### **Felt Needs, Normative Needs, and Real Needs**

Boyle (1981) describes a need that is motivated by a want or desire as a “felt need” (p. 142). Knowles (1980) is in agreement with this description. He argues that adult learners are primarily voluntary learners and, as such, they choose involvement in

learning activities based on what they feel will be appropriate to their needs. Knowles focuses on learner interests, his term for felt needs. Knowles contrasts learner interests with educational needs. Educational needs, according to Knowles, are “something people ought to learn for their own good, for the good of an organization, or for the good of society” (p. 88). Boyle (1981) refers to these educational “oughts” as normative needs, or standards. Knowles (1980) points out that it is sometimes the role of the program planner to facilitate or encourage an interest in an educational need among learners. However, between felt needs and educational needs lies what Knowles terms as “real need,” and what Boyle (1981) calls “the gap between what is and what could be” (p. 146). Knowles (1980) explains that “in fact, perhaps the highest expression of the art of the adult educator is skill in helping adults to discover and become interested in meeting their real needs” (p. 82).

Caffarella (1994) describes the use of a formal needs assessment to uncover educational needs and felt needs. She suggests that “the focus of the assessment is not on *solutions* for specific problems but on clarifying and defining the problem” (p. 75). Similar to Knox’s (1986) proficiency theory, needs assessment can provide data representative of the discrepancy between current and desired competencies. Needs assessment can also identify felt and educational needs. Boone (1985) also suggests that astute program planners can use needs assessment to identify both felt and unfelt needs. He states that “an important aspect of the educator’s job, perhaps the pivotal aspect, is the capability to perceive relationships among expressed needs and to envision relationships to needs that might be present but are not expressed” (p. 134). For Boone,

felt needs are often expressed, while unmet needs are not typically expressed and require careful needs identification. The identification of felt, normative, and real needs presents challenges for a program planner to understand existing competencies, to have clear criteria and long term objectives, and to bring appropriate strategies to address the complexities of a thorough needs assessment.

Program planners often use a range of needs assessment tools, including observation, survey questionnaires, interviews, and conversations (Caffarella, 1994). Central to needs assessment literature, however, is not the tools but the engagement of the learner. In summary, there is broad agreement that beginning a program plan that incorporates participant input increases the likelihood of participant involvement and motivation, program relevancy, and overall success. However, felt needs, educational needs, and real needs are all important in successful program planning.

### **Program Planning**

The adult education literature devotes specific attention to program planning. Upon review, it becomes apparent that program planning is an unfolding process requiring pre-, post-, and ongoing interventions. Some believe the planning process is as integral to the success of adult education programming as is the content of the program. Murk and Wells (1986), for instance, state that “the program plan and design that program coordinators utilize and implement may be the ultimate cause and reason for success or failure [of a student in a program]” (p. 3).

### Approaches to Program Planning

Caffarella, (1994), a significant author in program planning, defines the structure of program planning models as either open or closed systems. Closed systems are well defined and predictable, as opposed to open systems which account for the impact of external factors.

Caffarella contrasts the linear model of program planning that follows a sequencing of steps with her own interactive model. Her interactive model is an open system and she advocates it because she believes that “program planners often work with a number of planning components and tasks at the same time and not necessarily in any standard order” (p. 17). Linear models of program planning typically reflect classical step-by-step program planning. The classical approach to program planning usually incorporates five basic planning steps in the following sequence: conducting a needs assessment, setting learning objectives, choosing methods and resources, implementation, and evaluation. Caffarella suggests that a linear, step-by-step, approach does not accurately reflect the full reality of program planning in terms of the total number of program planning tasks. She presents her alternative interactive approach, saying program planners need to “conceptualize program planning as a process that consists of a set of interacting dynamic elements or components and decision points” (p. 8).

Cervero and Wilson (1994) would agree that a linear, classical approach to program planning is too simplistic and they go further in stating that it disregards consideration for external pressures that impact planning. Cervero and Wilson argue that

democratic planning calls for a negotiation of interests among those directly and indirectly affected by program planning. They suggest that it is the responsibility of the program planner to understand and respond to the political environment in which planning is taking place. They state: "If planners have good intentions but are not politically astute, they are likely to become martyrs or saints, not responsible educators" (p. 5).

The Systems Approach Model. In 1986, Murk and Wells presented an overview of the program planning literature, comprised of program planning reviews by Sork and Buskey (1986), Murk and Galbraith (1986), and Boone (1985). Murk and Wells state that "a conclusion or observation that the writers derived from the review of the literature . . . is that all of the models reviewed and analyzed to date still held to the notion of a sequential linear process of program planning and development" (p. 7).

In response to the limitations of linear program models, Murk and Wells present the Systems Approach Model (SAM) based on models previously developed by McKinley and Smith (1965), McKinley (1980), and Smith (1982). Components of this model include the following: (a) needs assessment, (b) instructional planning and development, (c) administration and budget information, (d) implementation of the program, and (e) evaluation. They argue that utilizing all five components is necessary to ensure success and that "the model has been tested and proven effective in several program planning experiences and has received positive evaluations toward providing and achieving desired outcomes of successful adult and continuing education programs" (p. 8). They contend that the Systems Approach Model for program planning addresses



the need for a program planning prototype which includes creativity, flexibility, and meets the needs of administrators, instructors, planners and participants. They explain that the Systems Approach Model “may be viewed as a wholistic approach to the entire program planning–teaching or learning process as well as a complete planning process in itself” (p. 17). This model accounts for the dynamic components of needs assessment, objective setting, administrative details, and evaluation.

Andragogical Approach. As mentioned earlier, Knowles (1980) has provided the field with one of the touchstone theories of adult education. It is based on humanist principles. Using andragogy, which he originally defined as the art and science of helping adults learn (p. 43), Knowles discusses program planning with a strong emphasis on participant involvement as a means of enhancing commitment by participants. As he explains: “Teachers of adults who do all the planning for their students, who come into the classroom and impose preplanned activities on them, typically experience apathy, resentment, and probably withdrawal” (p. 48). In this approach, the planner’s role is to utilize resources to facilitate the learning process. Knowles gives the following steps in this andragogical approach: (a) set the climate, (b) involve learners in mutual planning, (c) involve participants in diagnosing their own needs, (d) involve learners in setting objectives, (e) involve learners in designing learning plans, (f) help learners carry out learning plans, and (g) involve learners in evaluating.

Brookfield (1990) also strongly supports the notion of participant involvement. He suggests that when planners and participants share in the planning process, learners are more likely to engage in the learning process. He states that “[involvement] removes

some of their fear of the unknown, makes students feel respected and valued, and increases the likelihood of your teaching having some meaning for them” (pp. 155-56).

The Interactive Planning Model. Caffarella has contributed to the literature with her Interactive Planning Model (1994). Mentioned earlier, it is based on classical and contemporary planning approaches, adult learning theory, and real life experiences. While her planning model encompasses 11 specific steps, it differs from Murk and Wells’s (1986) Systems Approach Model in that her model depends entirely on the uniqueness of the planning task. It has parallels, instead, with andragogy and Knowles’s planning model. She explains that since so many dynamics are at play during the planning process that “the key to using this model of program planning is flexibility” (p. 19).

The components of the interactive model are as follows: (a) establish a basis for the planning process, (b) identify program ideas, (c) sort and prioritize program ideas, (d) develop program objectives, (e) prepare for the transfer of learning, (f) formulate evaluation plans, (g) determine formats, schedules, and staff needs, (h) prepare budgets and marketing plans, (i) design instructional plans, (j) coordinate facilities and on-site events and, (k) communicate the value of the program. The effectiveness of the interactive model rests in the six assumptions upon which it is built. These assumptions are: (a) that the focus should be on what participants learn and the resulting change, (b) the planning should both be predetermined and unpredictable, (c) planning must be flexible because it is interactive, (d) planning needs to be a cooperative effort, (e) the

planning process involves coordination on the part of the planner, and (f) trial and error is often assumed.

The value of Caffarella's interactive model is the notion that planning a program requires a logical procedural plan within a flexible framework. Accepting that flexibility is inevitable accounts for the complexities of putting a theory into practice. Caffarella believes that "planning and evaluating educational program for adult learners is both an organized and haphazard endeavor" (p. 1) involving a methodical approach accompanied by the ability to react as the process evolves.

### Evaluation

Evaluation is integral to any successful program planning process. Caffarella (1994) defines evaluation as "a process used to determine whether the design and delivery of a program were effective and whether the proposed outcomes were met" (p. 119). In linear program planning models based on a step-by-step approach, evaluation tends to be the final step in the process. Evaluation conducted upon completion of an intervention is known as summative evaluation. Evaluation as an ongoing activity during a program is referred to as formative evaluation, and is more representative of Caffarella's flexible program planning approach where periodic evaluation can impact the process while it is taking place.

As noted, formal planning for evaluation is critical to the planning process. In addition, Caffarella argues:

Although most models of program planning advocate a formal or systematic process of evaluating programs, informal and often unplanned evaluation

opportunities are also very useful; and in some cases, in fact, they are a critical part of a program planner's responsibilities. (p. 124)

One of the first researchers in the field, Houle (1972) established the need for continuous evaluation as a means for being responsive. He states that "the execution of a program is never merely the working out of a design already made in preparation for an evaluation which will come later. It is time of both accomplishment of plans and their constant readjustment" (p. 182). Murk and Walls (1997) later supported this notion, arguing that "continuous evaluation and follow-up functions are the core to successful program planning" (p. 11).

Sork (1988) has written on the ethical issues in evaluation. He gives a warning to the program planner who uncritically evaluates success based on the achievement of learning outcomes alone:

It can be argued, however, that because there are so many variables influencing what is learned during a program, and because adults enter programs with their own ideas of what they should learn, the practice of specifying outcomes misrepresents the complexity of the learning transaction. The act of specifying objectives can preempt the development of other capabilities that might be of more value to the learner. (p. 41)

For Sork, identifying learning outcomes is central to effective, ethical program planning practice. Nonetheless, he agrees that success is influenced by a variety of variables and, as such, requires consideration of the multiple forces influencing desired outcomes.

It is evident from the literature that evaluation, whether formative or summative, is critical to the planning process. Formative evaluation offers opportunity for in-process adjustments as a means of being responsive, while summative evaluation is a

means of measuring completion of program objectives with the potential for changing future programs or the systems that deliver them.

Program planning in adult education incorporates a wide variety of adult learning principles. Consideration of learning and teaching styles, planning for the transfer of learning, involving participants in the planning process, and responding to participants' needs, are some of the elements of program planning relative to adult education. The next section explores the process of planning programs to facilitate the job readiness of students.

### **Helping Students Learn in Preparation for the Workforce**

I address issues surrounding contemporary workforce changes in this section. In addition, I discuss employability skills required of responsive, aspiring members of the workforce.

#### **Responding to Changes in Demographics and Technology**

Cross (1981) makes the case that demographics play a role in understanding the growth of our learning society. Foot and Stoffman (1996) use demographics to make predictions about the future of the Canadian economy. Of particular significance is their view of the future of the workforce.

As Foot and Stoffman look back to the 1960s, they see a decline in population at that time that resulted in a decline in entry level workforce participants. This, they say, weakened the base of the traditional hierarchical corporate structure. Advances in

information technology also contributed to a pyramid shift as middle managers--traditionally serving communication roles between upper and lower management--were replaced by technology. They explain this technological impact as follows: "This function could now be done more directly and more quickly, but not necessarily more effectively, without human intermediaries" (p. 60). They contend that the mid-1980s was a transition point for the corporate workforce in Canada. They go on to describe the '80s as displaying "plateauing" or "career blocking" trends and explain this decade as a time when workers no longer saw opportunities for advancement. They view this era of stagnation as occurring due to the impact of two forces: changing demographics and technological advances

Plateauing was a result of demographic change intensified by the rapid development of labour-saving technology. In the mid-1990s, corporations are still engaged in the painful process of remaking themselves to adjust to these profound changes. At the same time, the nature of work, both within and outside the corporate world, is being redefined. (p. 57)

Foot and Stoffman explain the historical impact demographics had on the workforce. The increase in population resulting from the baby boom generation created an increase in the number of newcomers to the workforce. Over the years, this increase created what he refers to as a pyramid corporate structure. The majority of workers create the base of the pyramid and the pyramid narrows upwards toward middle and top management positions. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the result of demographics and technological advances saw a flattening of the traditional hierarchical work pyramid and, consequently, changes in career paths occurred within the workforce. These continue to today according to Foot and Stoffman.

They also describe four types of corporate career paths that have emerged since the 1960s, including linear (starting at the bottom and working toward the top), spiral (spiraling toward the top through a mixture of promotions and lateral moves), steady-state (a single occupation throughout life), and transitory (having a number of different careers throughout life). As they explain:

In the future, the fastest-growing career paths will be the spiral and the transitory, although the steady-state career path will always be with us. These two paths best fit the new economy being shaped in the mid-1900s and beyond by demographic and technological change. (p. 62)

This new order of career paths dramatically affects the nature of learning in that lifelong learning has become inherent to spiral and transitory career paths. New occupations and responsibilities require new learning. The contemporary perception of a valuable employee must reflect these changing structures. Foot and Stoffman believe that spiral and transitory career paths require generalists who can adapt quickly to change. They state that “the person who can offer a range of services within a broad specialty is the one most likely to prosper in the organization and economy of the future” (p. 63).

### Employability Skills

The sentiments of authors such as Foot and Stoffman (1996) and Evers, Rush, and Berdrow (1998) are echoed by the Corporate Council on Education in a publication by the Conference Board of Canada. As mentioned earlier, this Board’s research on the necessary foundational skills in a high-quality workforce is revealing. The Conference Board of Canada is an independent, applied research organization comprised of over 600

members from Canadian business, government, and the public sector who collect and disseminate information relevant to the Canadian and global economies. In 1997, the Conference Board of Canada produced a booklet with the help of the Corporate Council on Education listing generic skills, attitudes, and behaviors identified in the workforce as representing those qualities that employers look for in new employees. According to this research, these are also the qualities employers want trainers to emphasize in their training programs for employees. The skills, attitudes and behaviors are summarized in the Conference Board's Employability Skills Profile (1997). This skills profile divides the listing of critical skills required in the workforce into three components. First are the academic skills, referring to the necessary foundational abilities. Second are personal management skills comprising skills, attitudes, and behaviors; and third are teamwork skills described as those qualities needed to work with others.

Academic skills are made up of communication skills, thinking skills, and the abilities involved in learning to learn. Personal management skills include a positive attitude, behavior reflective of a strong work ethic, and demonstrated responsibility in the workplace. Teamwork skills include the ability to work as part of a group to contribute to a collective goal.

In addition to this three-part range of skills and attitudes, Tetreault (1997) reinforces the need for an emphasis on transferable skills for adult education and training. He adds this while arguing that transferable skills are necessary for any aspiring employee to be prepared for the demands of a contemporary workforce. He believes that traditional adult education has emphasized basic academics while neglecting applied



skills—a situation that has left some workers poorly prepared to retain employment. He suggests that “the workers did not fail; the curriculums that prepared them for the ‘real’ world did not prepare them for the daily interactive communication, planning, and social skills necessary to fit in long-term in these jobs” (p. 10). In support of this argument, Tetreault notes two American employability skills inventories developed by the U.S. Department of Labor and by the American Society for Training and Development that address the needs of the contemporary workforce. He remarks that “although both inventories use slightly different terminology, they both highlight personal responsibility, problem solving, communication skills, and teamwork, the hallmarks that labor and industry are now calling for” (p. 11).

It is evident from the literature that preparing students for the workforce requires the facilitation of learning and this, in turn, reflects the changing workplace. Students need to be aware of, and respond to, the needs of a contemporary workforce. Students entering the world of work must be able to adapt and engage in self-exploration to identify and articulate a multitude of skill sets. Most importantly, those who facilitate the job readiness of students must encourage continuous personal and professional growth among their learners.

### **Summary of the Literature**

Adult education has played an influential role in the development of Canadian and American economies. The education of adults continues to receive widespread

attention as technological, demographic, and social changes dictate the demand for continued, lifelong learning. Understanding the adult learning process is integral to being a successful, responsive facilitator of adult learning and this takes on some urgency when one reviews the recent workplace literature.

The concept of learning in adulthood is concerned with how adults acquire, assimilate, and utilize new knowledge. Learning is a complex activity encompassing a multitude of definitions and controversies. There exists within the study of adult education a variety of learning theories that provide paradigms for understanding learning in adulthood. Behaviorist, cognitive, and humanistic theories are three which provide perspectives from which a responsive facilitator of learning can understand and guide the learning process. Being a responsive adult educator requires an understanding of what motivates adults to learn and which facilitation strategies can enhance learner success. In addition, being aware of the issues and opportunities afforded by effective program planning is fundamental to optimizing learning encounters.

As industry struggles to keep pace with changing technology, employees find themselves responding to constant change and engaging in on-going learning. Those who aspire to become workforce participants must recognize the need to be skilled both in theory and personal management. Likewise, those facilitating learning in preparation for the workforce require an understanding of the contemporary workforce demands in order to be responsive.

In the next chapter, I describe the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a job readiness intervention I designed to prepare trades students for their community-

based work experience. Literature relevant to the learning process, strategies to foster effective learning, and contemporary workforce demands have informed my study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY**

In this chapter, I review the details of the study I undertook to provide job readiness training to students in a pre-employment trades training program at Atlantic University College. I discuss the origin of the study idea, emphasize the planning involved in carrying out the study, describe the implementation of the study, and give details of the evaluation process used to measure its success.

#### **An Overview of the Study**

The purpose of the action research study I undertook at Atlantic University College was to explore a curriculum change idea. The questions I sought to address were the following: First, what are the needs of the trades students in the trades education department of AUC and what are the job readiness expectations of prospective employers in the region? Second, how can I, as an adult educator, plan a job readiness program for AUC trades students that addresses these diverse needs? Third, how can I facilitate such a job readiness program for AUC trades students? In order to begin to answer these questions, I first engaged in the creation and implementation of several internal and external partnerships. Administration and faculty became involved, workshop participants' input was integral to the program design, and community

employers gave input through personal interviews and visits to the campus as co-facilitators of my workshops.

Specifically, during the 1997-1998 academic year, I began in-depth consultations with administration and faculty in the trades department at Atlantic University College to determine how I could implement an effective program plan that would meet the University College trades programs' needs. After attaining enthusiastic support from administration and faculty, I developed a study in consultation with my St FX advisor that consisted of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of job readiness workshops for two of five pre-employment trades classes. The purpose of the job readiness workshops was to facilitate the job readiness of students in preparation for their community-based work experience. As students completed their community work experience, I followed up with them to gain their feedback on how job ready they felt having participated in my job readiness workshop. I also followed up with students who did not participate in my workshop to determine how job ready they felt prior to completing their community work experience. This group served as a study comparison group. Finally, I followed up with a sample of the employers who hosted the students who were participants in my workshop to determine how job ready the students were in their view. Following is a discussion of the process I was involved in to design such a program.

### **Background to the Question**

In addition to offering trades students community work experience, the Atlantic University College offers a number of degree and diploma programs that include a community work experience component. Most of these degree and diploma programs offer students a job readiness curriculum in preparation for their community work experience. This job readiness curriculum is offered to degree and diploma students only and consists of a variety of formats including written texts and classroom delivery. The content includes information related to resume and cover letter development, job search strategies, and interview techniques. No such curriculum is offered to AUC's trades students and they have no formal preparation for their community work experience. My first goal was to engage in field research to obtain data that would determine whether the trades department would benefit from adding a job readiness workshop to their program curriculum.

### **Planning and Organizing the Study**

Planning was integral to the success of my research. I realized very early that an organized plan meant consideration of the entire planning process, including pre-implementation, implementation, and evaluation. I planned my study in phases in order to organize my responsibilities as a program planner.

## **Phase One: Gathering Support**

Gathering support was integral to the implementation of the study. I discuss how I sought and obtained support from administration, faculty, and students.

### Gathering Administration and Faculty Support

Initially, it was most important to determine the support of the trades department chair and instructors. Support could not be only in the form of verbal approval. Since my study involved meetings with department staff, classroom interventions, and interviews with local community employers, the department chair--Bob Smith (fictitious names are used throughout)-- had to be up to date and knowledgeable at all times about the progress of the study.

Mr. Smith gave me generous support. As will be described later, his signature on letters sent to employers gave the study a stronger sense of credibility. He also took documentation related to the study to industry meetings to discuss the work being done to prepare students for their school-to-work transition. Mr. Smith made some very supportive statements including, "Just let me know what I can do to help," and, "I want to bring the information you've collected to my meetings and I'll give *you* credit for the work." Since he is also a journeyman, he was able to give valuable information on aspects of the trades I would be working with.

I next gained support from the instructors in the trades department. The heavy duty instructor--Jim Baker--is a graduate of one of Atlantic University College's diploma programs and he had received job readiness training as a mandatory part of his academic

study a few years before this study. He was overwhelming in support of the need for job readiness training as he had personally experienced the benefits as a student. He wanted to help me with my research because he said he saw the benefits to his students. The automotive instructor--Dave McCharles--was also supportive and encouraging about the proposed study. He offered information from personal experience and continuously sent literature to me through the internal mail that he thought might be helpful.

During the planning of the study, Dave McCharles, the automotive instructor, changed positions. Since Mr. McCharles remained in the trades department, he was also a valuable and welcome resource throughout this study. Among the valuable feedback obtained from him was a list of automotive employers who had networked with AUC in the past on a pilot project that involved a community work experience component. As will be described later, this was the basis of the beginning of my contacts with local employers.

At the point of conducting the students' felt needs assessment, the new automotive instructor resigned from his position and this had implications for the participants in my study. A third automotive instructor came into my study--Danny Davidson. Mr. Davidson was completely in support of my study. He even remarked, "I think I could benefit from this workshop myself. Can I attend?" I was fortunate to have support from all three successive instructors in the trades department. I also realized that support from the department chair was even more important as new faculty typically turned to their supervisor for direction when I approached them about their involvement in my research. This, however, was only the first vital step in this study.



### Gathering Student Support

The next form of support I required was from students. While the value of participating in a job readiness workshop was obvious to me, and although the need had been identified and confirmed by administration and faculty within the trades department, it was important to know the felt needs of the students. This was especially important because the students involved in the needs survey would ultimately be the participants in my workshops. Having students identify their felt needs helped me determine much of the content of the workshop. Determining content in this way gave a sense of ownership to the students and offered me an opportunity to learn how to be a more responsive facilitator. An understanding of students' felt needs also guided my interviews with employers during the employer survey, to be discussed later.

In order to determine students' felt needs, I developed a needs assessment instrument according to the AUC's Ethics Review Committee guidelines. Once the students' needs assessment was developed, I pre-tested it prior to submitting it to the Ethics Review Committee. I conducted pre-tests with 7 colleagues for clarity, presentation, wording, and timing. Once I received their feedback and made changes, I gave a copy to the department chair for his approval. Finally, I submitted my proposal to the Ethics Review Committee on October 30, 1998. I received approval on November 10, 1998.

Conducting the Assessment of Students' Felt Needs. Voluntary participation was an important consideration in conducting this assessment of students' felt needs. With this in mind, I was open and honest when I attended classes to distribute the surveys

about the purpose of my research. I made it very clear that participation was completely at the students' discretion. I explained that their input would help me design the content of the workshop and I described my plan to interview employers and trades instructors. I strongly emphasized two points: that their input would definitely be considered in the workshop design and, although this may be used in a masters' thesis, their comments would be kept completely confidential. They responded favorably with comments including, "Sure I'll do that," and "I have no problem doing that for you." They were especially interested in the employer interviews and some gave suggestions about the types of businesses I should include.

I conducted needs assessments of the automotive and heavy duty students on the same day—November 18, 1998. The assessments I gave yielded two types of results: empirical data, and learning experiences that contributed to my own professional development through the study process. As will be seen, 22 of the 22 (100%) in attendance in the heavy duty class willingly participated in the needs assessment survey. As a whole, the group was very enthusiastic. They asked questions about when I would be returning, what types of information they would be receiving and, some gave comments on the value of similar workshops they had attended in the past. Twenty-two of the 23 automotive students in class voluntarily participated in the needs assessment survey, and while not appearing to be as openly enthusiastic as the heavy duty students, they graciously accepted my presence in class. One automotive student immediately left the room when I explained that participation was voluntary. While it was unfortunate that I did not have his input, he left very quietly and I respected his right to do so.

I learned a lot as an adult educator through this early stage of the study. The day I conducted the needs assessment of students was within the same week that the automotive instructor announced that he was leaving. This affected the mood of the class to some degree. Many were discontent that they would be spending the remainder of their year with a new instructor and voiced concerns about being appropriately trained as a result. However, an additional factor had an impact on the needs assessment survey. The departing automotive instructor suggested I come to class with the needs assessment survey at 1:30 p.m. Although I did not know it, this was the same time the class was scheduled to write a test. When I arrived, the instructor, test in hand, introduced me to the class and told them I would like to speak with them and hand out a survey before they began their test. This produced a classroom filled with moans and groans, much to my disappointment. One student immediately stood up and left the classroom. Twenty-two remained and agreed to participate in the survey. It was evident that the timing for requesting participation in a needs assessment survey is crucial to the response. It was very inappropriate for the instructor to have me arrive at a time when students' thoughts and anxieties were focused on an anticipated test, and this was in addition to the news that they were getting a new instructor. I expected little enthusiasm and anticipated a poor response to the survey. Much to my delight, my instincts could not have proven me more wrong. While the response to my presence in the automotive class appeared less enthusiastic than the response received in the heavy duty class, the written replies indicated interest, enthusiasm, and a desire to participate in a job readiness workshop from both classes. The two groups were indistinguishable at this point.

I moved from feeling negative about this experience to a much more positive feeling when I realized how much I had learned about the significance of timing and emotions around questionnaires. I also learned that although a few students were vocal and rather negative about my study, the written responses were overwhelmingly positive. As a facilitator, this meant that I needed to keep in mind that a few loud voices are not necessarily representative of the entire class.

The results of the students' needs assessment indicated a strong interest in participating in a job readiness workshop. They were extremely interested in receiving information related to resume and cover letter preparation, job search techniques, and interview techniques. These interests were addressed in the workshop content. They were especially interested in the employer feedback suggesting that I visit a variety of businesses. This helped guide my selection of employers to be surveyed. I also responded to their written comments about location and timing for the workshop. The majority of students wanted a 1-day workshop held in their own classroom. They identified the need for a variety of information delivery styles, including lecture, instructor-learner interaction, group work, and employer visits. All of this feedback was incorporated into the design of the workshop.

### **Phase Two: Gathering Employer Input**

The next phase of the study required me to engage in interviews with community employers. This took place over the period of November 1998 to January 1999.

### The Employer Survey

While I considered myself able to provide much of the necessary job readiness skills information needed for someone entering the workforce on a general level, it became obvious from the feedback I had received from students, administration, and my St FX advisor that students also needed relevant information obtained directly from the local employers. I realized that this would make my workshop directly responsive to the audience and it would increase my own knowledge of employer expectations.

I had a genuine sense of excitement about conducting the employer survey. I appreciated that it would be a lot more time consuming than the students' felt needs assessment, but the potential of such an exercise was very motivating for me. Here was a chance to learn what local employers were looking for explicitly. I first had the employer survey questionnaire critiqued by four individuals whose jobs require them to interact with local employers on a regular basis. They were all AUC employees who understood the scope of my study. Once finalized and modified, I presented an application to the Ethics Review Committee of AUC on November 6, 1998. I received approval on November 16, 1998.

I used the resource lists of employers provided by Dave McCharles and Jim Baker in addition to a local business directory to identify ten automotive employers and ten heavy duty employers who were willing to participate in my survey questionnaire. Employers who were available at the time I phoned, or able to schedule an appointment within my planned time frame, were participants in the survey.

Of the ten heavy duty employers I surveyed, eight were from privately owned truck and transport repair shops and two were in government departments which repair their own heavy duty equipment. All of these places of employment were located within the surrounding area of AUC. All employer interviewees were male. All were members of the heavy duty trade, except one. He owned a trucking business.

Of the ten automotive employers I surveyed, seven owned or held management positions in dealerships and one owned a service station. Another ran a small repair shop and one had a mid-sized auto repair shop. Eight of ten surveyed in this group were male and all were located in the surrounding area. Neither of the females surveyed were trained technicians. In addition, only three of the ten employers surveyed were trained technicians in the automotive trade.

Conducting the Employer Survey. I began the process by setting appointments with employers in order to be assured they would be available when I arrived at their place of business. Initially, I found this process very uncomfortable because I was trying to explain so much in a short conversation in order for the employer to get a sense of what I wanted. My immediate reaction to this discomfort was to attempt some “cold calls” where I would simply drop into a place of employment and request the interview. Upon trying both approaches to conducting interviews, I soon realized that telephoning ahead proved much more appropriate because employers were prepared to give me their time if it was planned in advance. I was requesting time of some very busy people and they were more willing to schedule an appointment than to participate in an interview on the spot. In addition, they were not as surprised to have a female contact them about

their job readiness expectations regarding hiring technicians in a male dominated profession. As I conducted the first few interviews, I inquired as to what might be the most or least appropriate time of the day or week to expect a service manager to be able to give up some time to complete my survey. I learned that early morning, late afternoon, and the end of the month were usually the least appropriate times to request an interview. I scheduled the remaining interviews accordingly.

This was a learning exercise for me. It became a means for appreciating the experiences that students might have during their door-to-door job search. When I made unplanned visits to automotive employers, I usually got responses such as: "I'm sorry, we are not doing any hiring," or "What is it that you are looking for," or simply a pause--possibly because I am a woman and this was an unexpected event in their daily routine.

Scheduling automotive employer interviews was a simpler process than scheduling heavy duty employer interviews because most heavy duty employers were working supervisors, meaning that time spent participating in my interview process was time taken away from the actual labor work being done in the heavy duty garage. The majority of the automotive employers were managers responsible for administrative work. Most were not technicians, making them more accessible and more in control of their own time. Scheduling heavy duty employer interviews was at times a very frustrating experience as many responded with, "Call me on the morning that you want to come and I'll see how my schedule is for that day." This never happened during the automotive scheduling.

Difference Resulting from the Distinctions Among Employers. I encountered scheduling obstacles with the heavy duty employers; nonetheless, I collected some very interesting data from them. It became apparent that the heavy duty employers related differently to the challenge of students looking for work than did the automotive employers that I surveyed. The heavy duty employers made reference to when they were apprentices and seemed to empathize with what lay ahead for aspiring technicians. When providing advice on the survey to aspiring heavy duty technicians, their responses included comments like, “Be good to the old guys and they’ll teach you.” And, “Pay attention to the old guys, they may not know the tech’ buzz, but they know how things operate when the computer breaks down.” On the other hand, the automotive employers emphasized a more general work ethic reflective of employers overall. They said, for instance: “Personal presentation is everything,” and, “Things are changing and you have to be willing to change with it.” It seemed that the automotive employers were more removed from the concept of hiring and work ethic.

Reflecting on the survey experience and data, I generalize that the heavy duty employers who participated in my interviews portrayed a sense of brotherhood among professionals in their field. They said aspiring employees should capitalize on this work culture when interacting with potential employers. By comparison, I thought that students approaching automotive employers who are not technicians in the automotive trade would be well advised to emphasize a general work ethic—an ethic that would be universal among most trades or businesses. I shared these observations and they opened



up dialogue during my job readiness workshop since this would be relevant to their community work experience.

Reviewing the Process of Data Collection from Employers. Employer interviews were approximately one half hour in duration, although they ranged from 20 minutes to two hours as dictated by the interviewee. Nineteen of the 20 interviews were conducted in person and one was conducted over the telephone at the request of the employer. A 21st interview was conducted which I did not include in the compilation of data because their hiring practices had changed within the company and their positions were no longer being filled by apprentices. I approached seven additional employers throughout the study in the course of trying to get the total of 20 interviews but, due to scheduling difficulties, or due to repeated unreturned phone calls, they could not be part of the survey. Nevertheless, no employer that I contacted directly refused to participate in the survey process.

I gave each employer a copy of the questionnaire to follow while I read the questions aloud. I wrote their responses to the questions and I was available if they needed any clarification. I directly incorporated the data obtained during the employer surveys into the content of the job readiness workshops. However, in some cases, I had to put employers' comments into context. For example, when employers responded to the question of how important training grades were in making a decision to hire someone, some of the responses needed explanation. Some explained that grades were only "somewhat important" or "not at all important" when making a hiring decision. When I discussed this with students, I explained that this did not mean that employers in

my survey were expressing a willingness to hire students who failed their training. They were saying that grades were not the only indication of potential and that they assumed there would be a basic knowledge from program graduates. I did not want students leaving my workshop with a false sense of employers' expectations or a loss of confidence in the value of grades. I clearly explained that successful completion of their course was mandatory for employment in their trade; however, according to my survey results, additional factors influence an employer's hiring decision.

The interviews revealed that employers look not only for skills but also for certain attitudes when they hire. Good attitudes, interest in learning, a sense of integrity and, as one put it, "Somebody with a plan for themselves," were all named as important qualities by the employers. They also looked for communications skills, critical thinking skills, and an ability "to think off the top of their head," as one put it. Another described the type of worker most desired: "I need a thinker--a troubleshooter--to read manuals and fill out work orders."

In general, the data collected indicated strong expectations on the part of the employers that students would be well prepared with a basic trades knowledge, a thoroughly developed resume, and a cover letter for the resume. They also expected a professional presentation and demeanor in the interview. Overall, employers expressed a need for employees who would be flexible, versatile, willing to learn, and who had good communication skills.

As a show of appreciation, I sent each employer who participated in my survey a thank you card. I wrote a note in each to express my gratitude for their contribution to

my research, and to the job search efforts of the heavy duty and automotive classes of 1999.

### **Phase Three: Implementation of the Intervention**

Phase three of my study was the actual implementation of the workshops. As mentioned earlier, the time spent on facilitation was small compared to the time spent on planning the study.

#### Intervention Description

The workshops consisted of two, 1-day workshops designed to provide job readiness skills to students in the heavy duty and automotive pre-employment classes at AUC. As part of the job readiness training, four employers (two heavy duty and two automotive) were brought in as guest speakers for 1-hour sessions. Unfortunately, time did not permit their presentations to be held on the same days as the workshops. The visiting employers met the class during their regular course time and discussed employer expectations relevant to job readiness and job performance with them.

#### Planned Learning Outcomes

I planned for the participant learning outcomes based on the students' felt needs and the employers' identified job readiness expectations. I expected the following student learning outcomes for the study: First, I expected students should understand the variety of resume and cover letter styles and should gain an understanding of how to create a contemporary resume and cover letter. Second, students should learn about

transferable skills, including how to identify transferable skills of their own and how to articulate these skills to a potential employer, either verbally or in a cover letter and resume. Third, students should understand the process of conducting a productive, organized job search, including creating a contact list, responding to advertisements, making contacts in person, and using the Internet. Students should also learn what is involved in preparing for an interview, including practicing possible answers to interview questions, preparing specific information they would like to articulate to an employer, preparing personal presentation and demeanor, and having a basic understanding of contemporary workforce needs in order to respond appropriately. I planned content to reflect data collected from my employer survey as well. In particular, I expected that students should be knowledgeable about employers' emphasis on the need for a positive attitude and critical thinking skills. Finally, I expected that my students should become aware of resources on the AUC campus to help them with their work placement job search.

### Workshop Objectives

In addition to these planned learning outcomes, I also had a number of workshop objectives. Informed by the program planning literature, I designed the workshops to accomplish the following objectives. First, I wanted to provide a comfortable learning environment that would encourage student participation. Second, I sought to provide relevant, meaningful information that would increase the students' understanding of the subject matter. Third, I hoped to present the information in an interesting way that

would appeal to a variety of learning styles. Finally, and above all, I hoped to enhance the knowledge and confidence of my students so they could conduct a productive job search, and a successful interview and community work experience.

I facilitated both the heavy duty students' workshop and the automotive students' workshop according to the same agenda, although I changed certain aspects of the content as appropriate to the particular group. Each workshop was scheduled from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. with two planned 15-minute breaks and a 1-hour lunch break. Refreshments were provided for the morning break and participants were required to provide their own lunch.

#### A Review of the Heavy Duty Job Readiness Workshop

I conducted the job readiness workshop for the heavy duty students on Thursday, January 28, 1999. During one of the planning meetings with instructors, I was asked whether or not I wanted instructors to tell the students that I would be coming, or would I rather just show up. The rationale from instructors was that if students did not know that I was coming, I would get higher attendance. Since I wanted workshop participation to be completely voluntary, I asked the instructors to plan for my arrival with the class. However, this did make me wonder about how many would actually show up without being mandated to do so. To my delight, 20 of 21 heavy duty students showed up for the workshop.

Heavy Duty Workshop Participant Profile. The 20 students in the heavy duty workshop were diverse in terms of age, work experience, and job readiness knowledge. They were, however, homogeneous in terms of gender. All participants were male. The

age groups included students in their late teens, 20s, 30s, and 40s with an average age of approximately 25. The participants also brought an array of experiences from their varied work histories. Some shared their work experiences, especially when they grew to understand the value of transferable skills. Others were quieter; I will discuss later how even the quieter ones engaged in dialogue in the small group exercises. The heavy duty instructor did not participate in the workshop, although he dropped in occasionally throughout the day.

Setting the Environment. The day of the first workshop, I arrived early to rearrange the traditional lecture-style classroom and opened the windows to air out the very stuffy room. I made a horseshoe-style seating arrangement and included a seat within it for myself. This is a common classroom arrangement advocated by Knowles (1980) and most adult educators (e.g.; Wlodkowski, 1993, Caffarella, 1994). An overhead projector, television, and VCR system that I had previously booked through the audio visual department were in the classroom as requested. Once everyone arrived, and got over the shock of the room arrangement, I handed out paper for each person to make a name tent for the front of their desks and we began our introductions. I printed my name tent and began with my own introduction. I asked each individual to identify one skill or piece of knowledge he would like to take away from the workshop. I made notes to ensure that identified topics were covered. We then reviewed the agenda and I called for any revisions. I was quickly advised that I had not planned for smoke breaks and would have a number of unhappy students if this activity was not incorporated into the schedule. I

assigned a smoker to be the alarm to “sound off” when smoking was essential. He agreed, and this seemed to put the smokers in the group at ease.

As recommended in Brookfield’s (1990) and Wlodkowski’s (1993) work, I discussed my idiosyncracies as a facilitator with the group prior to beginning the first topic on the agenda. I explained to them that I tend to roll my eyes back when I am trying to think of the right words to express my thoughts. I explained that I like to use a lot of examples to explain my ideas and that I appreciate and encourage as much feedback as possible from participants, even if it is in disagreement with my opinion. I also stressed the point that there is no such thing as a “stupid question.” I reminded the students that some had given a lot of valuable insights in their needs assessment already and I hoped they would share their knowledge with the rest of the class. I added that even if someone did not have personal experiences to share, their open comments would always be helpful. I also described the employer survey that I had conducted and explained how it would be incorporated into the workshop. Specifically, I said that as we covered theory surrounding each job readiness concept, I would provide related feedback from local employers.

A Review of the Heavy Duty Workshop Content. I included a number of overheads in the introduction on labor market information relevant to the heavy duty trade. I had obtained this information from the Human Resources Development Canada’s (HRDC) web site. I chose to include employment information representative of parts of Nova Scotia, Alberta, and Ontario. I highlighted information specific to salaries, the average age range of employed heavy duty technicians, their employment

prospects, and I showed the students how to apply critical thinking to interpret the statistical information. For example, salaries had to be compared to age ranges since the younger ages would probably represent apprentice technicians. When this range dominated a category, the salary would correspond and, thus, be lower. The students seemed to enjoy this introduction and it initiated a lot of discussion among participants. I also read a scenario from Human Resource Development Canada's (HRDC) Canada Prospects magazine (1997-98), which depicted a hiring situation. It highlighted many of the topics to be included in my workshop such as cover letters, resumes, the short-listing process, interview preparation, and information on the actual interview. This was a way of showing how all the components of the workshop fit into a bigger picture and thus it served as a good introduction. The final section of the introduction included a review of the Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills Profile (1997) and I presented it as something we would refer to throughout the day.

I began the resume review with some general tips and concentrated on the fact that developing a resume should not be an intimidating experience. I pointed out that it has simply taken the place of an application form in most business settings. I also included a warning that there are many and varied opinions about what constitutes a proper resume, stressing that students should not get overwhelmed with this. The task should be to incorporate ideas and find a style that suits the student and addresses the employer's needs, rather than trying to duplicate a single existing style.

The visual aids I used in the presentation on resumes and cover letters included my overheads, the use of a flip chart, and several handouts. My overhead transparencies



included the resume-related information that I had obtained from my employer survey. For example, I showed the survey data that 20 of 20 employers surveyed considered a resume “important” when making a decision to hire a new employee. Flip chart information included the information that I had developed and used in job readiness classes for other on-campus programs during my work at AUC. Handouts included an introduction to the concept of transferable skills, an exercise in identifying transferable skills, resume writing guidelines, a list of ten most common resume-writing mistakes, a sheet of action verbs, and information about how to include references in a resume. The presentation style here, as with each component of the workshop, encouraged dialogue among participants. I sought their opinions and experiences. Backes (1997) suggests that handouts serve as a good resource after a workshop has ended. This proved helpful in the design of my workshop because the use of handouts gave participants written information that they could read at a later time.

I presented information that underscored the importance of using a cover letter when applying for a job in the heavy duty trade. This topic had been chosen on the basis of the students’ needs assessment. Discussion arose during this portion of the presentation. The questions asked included the appropriate length of a cover letter, its actual importance, and whether or not an employer would really take the time to read a cover letter. One commented, “I never realized how important a cover letter could be.”

At break time, I provided refreshments from our campus cafeteria, which was greatly appreciated by the students. One student asked, “Did you pay for this yourself? That’s really nice of you.” When their instructor dropped in on occasion, they joked with

him about this saying, “Look at what Jodi did for us, we’ll expect this from you tomorrow.” Some even made reference to this in the workshop evaluation. Providing coffee and sweets was my way of showing appreciation to students for their contribution to my research and it represented for me a way of responding to participants as adult learners.

The job search section of the workshop was originally planned to be held in the AUC student centre computer lab. It was a means of responding to those students who indicated an interest in holding the workshop outside of their regular classroom. On the day of the workshop, students informed me that a number of them did not obtain log-in passwords for the campus network and could not access the computers in the student centre lab, although they were all capable of using computers in their own computer lab in the trades department. I organized a last minute change of location. I booked their own computer lab back in their department and canceled the student centre lab.

I began the job search component of the workshop by identifying the connection between the skills used in job searching and the skills used in an interview. I explained that it is very common for an employer to consider an initial contact a form of interviewing. Again, the flip chart from my job search classes complemented the discussion, as did relevant overheads from my employer survey. For example, 17 of the 20 employers in my survey indicated that a cover letter was “important” when making a hiring decision. For this section, my handouts included how to brainstorm networking contacts and I gave them control sheets for keeping track of their job contacts. Prior to moving to the computer lab, I gave them handouts introducing the use of the Internet as a

job search tool. I also handed out Industry Canada's brochures explaining the National Graduate Register (1996) employment web site. These brochures explain the process for post-secondary graduate students to register for employment through a federally funded web site. In addition, names of employers who are registered with the National Graduate Register are listed on this web site. This gave students a long contact list.

Using the computer lab was a way to be responsive, but it was also a means of giving students hands-on experience. Students used the Internet to access Human Resource Development's (HRDC) job information and job listing web site. This proved to be a valuable learning opportunity for most of the students. While they said the job search information was helpful, one remarked, " I learned more in that short time about how to use a computer than I learned so far in my computer class."

Students were on their own during lunch and I asked them to return at 1:00 p.m. Over lunch, I found an empty room and filled out the participation certificates that I handed out at the end of the workshop.

My original plan for the afternoon session was to show a video and do group exercises to facilitate the interviewing component of the workshop. However, earlier in the morning some of the students commented that the videos used in their regular class were considered an opportunity for catching up on sleep. I realized from the morning session that the amount of input from participants was making it difficult to keep to the workshop schedule, yet I did not want to eliminate this discussion. I also could see that the room was getting very stuffy, so I asked the group if they agreed with leaving out the

video portion of the workshop and going directly to a group exercise. They all agreed to this agenda change and we moved to the critical thinking exercise.

Students worked in four small groups for this exercise. There were five students in each. Each group was given a neutral statement that represented some element of a job searcher's background. For instance, "applicant has had a lot of short term jobs." For each scenario, two groups were given the same statement. One group was asked to discuss how the job searcher might emphasize the value of the statement, while the other group of students was asked to identify how an employer might view the same information as a negative piece of information. The objective of the exercise was to illustrate to participants how a piece of information may be perceived differently by different people, and to have them practice the skill of consistently presenting information in a positive way to an employer. A group representative was asked to present the statement to the rest of the class, and the group was then asked to identify ways an employer might perceive the statement as negative. Next, a representative from the other group was asked to present the group's ideas about how a job searcher might present the same statement and identify it in a positive way to an employer. The students seemed to really enjoy this exercise and used a lot of critical thinking in the process. Some students said that trying to look at a situation from two sides gave them insight into how they could think about a situation, see it from another perspective, and find the best way to present it to an employer. A number of students commented: "I never thought of presenting something that way," and, "This makes you really think about how to present yourself."

After a short break, we moved to interviewing theory. This included overheads from my employer survey, handouts outlining tips on preparing for the interview, references going back to the transferable skills handout, a list of personal qualities one should “market” during an interview, and guidelines on how to perform during an interview. The discussion on these ideas was lively. Comments included: “I wish I could say all this stuff during an interview.” One student who had a lot of previous work experience said, “This really works.”

After a break, we moved to the interview portion of the workshop and I concluded the afternoon with a role playing exercise. I called for volunteers to participant in an interview skit and utilized scripts I had obtained from Bissonnette’s (1987) job readiness workbook. I modified the scripts to reflect the likely interview scenario of apprentice technicians. A total of four participants volunteered. One volunteer had a script that asked typical interview questions of the other three who were playing the part of someone being interviewed. The three being interviewed had different scripts which represented a “poor,” “good,” and “very good” answer to each question asked. As each question was answered, we had a group discussion as to why each response was “poor,” “good,” or “very good.” This created a dynamic discussion. Comments included: “What I thought was a good answer only seemed good until I heard a better answer,” and, “It takes a lot of thought to come up with one of the best answers.”

Finally, I incorporated an evaluation of the workshop into the agenda. I will review the evaluation results later in this chapter. While students filled out the evaluation forms, I handed out certificates of participation to each participant. In

addition to the information obtained from the evaluation forms, I made notes at the end of the day that reflected comments made by the students so that I could incorporate the ideas into my next workshop. I also re-visited my agenda to compare the time anticipated and the actual time each component took to accomplish. I made field notes on what had occurred and I made revisions to the second presentation the following week.

### A Review of the Automotive Job Readiness Workshop

I conducted the automotive workshop on Wednesday, February 3, 1999. The format duplicated that used for the heavy duty class with slight modifications made as a result of what I learned from the first workshop. The modifications included the following: a) I planned for the use of the trades department computer lab as opposed to the AUC student centre lab, b) I requested a designated smoker to alert me to the need for a smoke break, which the students appreciated, c) I included a sample resume on an overhead transparency as requested by participants in the previous group and, d) I anticipated the possibility of revising the afternoon schedule to fit the time frame. I presented the original schedule and allowed students to choose which afternoon activities they wanted to include and exclude to fit the time frame. These modifications came as a result of taking field notes when students made comments during the first workshop, from the course-end feedback from students who participated in the first workshop, and from my own re-evaluation of the time allotted for each section of the workshop. Another change to this workshop was the addition of the automotive instructor as a workshop participant.

As described earlier, the automotive students had a change of instructors during their course. I used this opportunity to express the valuable skills students had acquired as a result of having a number of instructors, which could be equated with being responsible to a number of supervisors. For instance, I asked them to think about how they could tell a potential employer that they have learned under the direction of three instructors who taught differently and, as such, could respond to direction from a variety of supervisors. I also asked them to consider the value of knowing early that not all technicians would approach the same task the same way and, as a result, that they might be more willing to learn new ways of doing a task. I wanted the students to see the value in what seemed to be a negative situation and use it as a marketable skill to an employer. Generally, students seemed receptive to this way of thinking. For instance, one commented, "You're right, we have learned that they all don't do things the same way." Another said, "I could work for anybody now."

Automotive Workshop Participant Profile. Fifteen of 20 automotive students participated in the job readiness workshop. This was a less diverse group than the heavy duty students, although variations among participants existed. Fourteen students were male, which made me very mindful of being gender-inclusive in my language. In addition, having a female student this time influenced some of the dialogue. For instance, the female student expressed some of her concerns about preparing for work in a male-dominated career. She asked, "I wonder if employers will really give me the opportunity to show my skills?" The instructor was very supportive of her and gave

feedback, including, “You have a lot to offer an employer, and learning how to present it will help.”

Ages ranged from late teens to 30s, with the majority at the 19 to 23-year-old range. The average age was approximately 21 years old. The employment histories again ranged from no work experience to a variety of experiences. Individual participation in group discussion was very high among this group and, to my chagrin, included a constant heckler. One student continually made comments about how he had a job and he really did not need to be at the workshop. One of his comments in reference to the cover letter component was, “Employers don’t have time for all this.” This made me feel as though he was challenging my entire workshop, although other participants laughed at his outbursts and seemed not to take him very seriously. Yet, it was a source of concern for me. Since I knew he, like all the participants, was there on a voluntary basis, I assumed he wanted to get something from the workshop. Rather than stifle his comments, I pointed out when he was inappropriately interrupting. Then, when it was an appropriate moment, I called on him to contribute so that he would participate in a more beneficial way.

Mr. Davidson, the class instructor, made very valuable contributions to the group as a participant. In this case, I found he supported a lot of the information obtained from the automotive employers who had participated in my survey. On the other hand, it is possible that his presence affected the way the learners responded and acted. I raised this as a possible limitation in chapter 1.



### Differences Between the Two Workshops

Having the instructor attend one of the workshops certainly added to the workshop content. Being from industry, his attendance offered an additional employer perspective and his answers to participants' questions went well beyond my experience and background. To complement this, I brought my husband's resume to the automotive workshop as a sample (with his permission). He is an automotive technician and the students found his resume format helpful, although they asked for additional types of resume formats and wanted them sent as a follow-up. I visited the class the following week to provide additional sample resumes. This also prompted me to re-visit the heavy duty class at the same time and provide them with sample resume formats. The automotive group also chose to omit the video section of the workshop, as was done in the heavy duty workshop. In this case, the automotive instructor borrowed it and showed it at a later date.

The female perspective in the automotive class brought out issues of concern that participants in the previous heavy duty workshop had not raised. For instance, she expressed her concern about not being given the same learning opportunity in her community work experience as her male classmates. The class discussed the need for every student to emphasize a willingness to take on tasks as part of this opportunity to learn, and they agreed it is important to ensure that the employer understands that females can be fully equal with the males on the job site.

The automotive class had an additional source of motivation that did not appear in the heavy duty workshop. During the Internet job search component of the automotive

workshop, an actual job for an automotive apprentice appeared in the local listings of the HRDC's National Job Bank. This motivated students more than had occurred in the previous workshop and I used it as a living example of what we were learning.

As a facilitator, I was much more relaxed facilitating the automotive workshop than the heavy duty workshop. I think this was because I had been through the entire process once and simply felt more confident the second time through.

### Employer Visits

As identified in the students' felt needs survey, there was a strong interest in having employers from the community visit the classes. During the employer survey, I identified four employers who had either expressed an interest in speaking directly to students, or who could clearly make a significant contribution to my workshop. Two employers from each trade participated in my workshops. Scheduling did not allow them to participate on the same day as my workshops; therefore, time was set aside during the regular automotive and heavy duty class time. I concluded from the student evaluations and my own observation that they made outstanding contributions to the workshops.

Each employer spent approximately 1-hour in the class. The only direction I gave them was that students were interested in knowing about what work is like at their place of business, something about potential job prospects in their field, their expectations of an employee, and any additional job readiness information that would be beneficial to participants.

All four employers began with a description of a typical day of work at their respective shops. They described the tasks of an apprentice compared with the tasks of a

journeyperson. They gave salary ranges and employment prospects, both locally and regionally. Each one described in their own words what they believed to be the attributes of a valuable employee. All four described the need for a strong work ethic, an interest in learning, and the value of being a team player. One employer commented, "I am most impressed with two technicians who work for me and never stand around. When there aren't cars to work on, they keep themselves busy cleaning the garage." Another said, "It's important in our garage to work as part of a team--the garage and the service department work together." One of the heavy duty employers commented, "There is always something new to learn. Learning doesn't end in school." Another explained the importance of identifying communication skills on a resume and added: "Write about your experiences on your resume even if they don't directly relate to the trade." He gave an example: "If you are involved in the 4H Club, this will show that you spend your spare time in a constructive way and are involved in your community."

Feedback from students indicated that the employers' visits were valuable. One wrote, "I found that I learned a lot more about how the shop operates and what the employer is looking for in an applicant." Another remarked, "I think it was a very good idea to have employers come into the class and talk to us about the trade." He further noted: "It made us realize that there are jobs out there and it gave us an idea of what employers are looking for in employees." One noted, "It gave me some good insight into the dealership aspect of the trade and how the service writer and the mechanic have to be a well-rounded team to keep business going." On the other hand, one student made reference to the fact that the visiting employers, for the most part, were only

representative of their own place of business, commenting: “It just seemed to be more specific to the place they work at.”

As a token of our appreciation to the employers who took time away from their busy schedules, I chose one student from each of the four sessions to present an AUC coffee mug and a thank you card to the speakers. I wanted the employers to have something that would remind them of their contribution to the job readiness of the class of 1999.

Evaluating the workshops and the study overall is the emphasis of the next part of this chapter.

#### **Phase Four: Evaluation of the Workshop and Study**

Although a summative evaluation occurred at the end of the workshops and constituted most of the evaluation of my study, formative evaluation was also built into the planning process. It was important to plan for evaluation from the beginning of the study because I needed a means of determining whether or not my study intervention was worthwhile.

##### **Evaluation Formats**

Evaluation of my study was conducted in five ways: a) participants’ evaluation of the workshops, b) students’ evaluation of the employer visitations to class, c) participants’ evaluation of their felt job readiness upon completion of their work experience, d) non-participants’ evaluation of their felt job readiness upon completion of

their work experience (comparison group), and, e) employers' evaluation of the job readiness of my workshop participants. Informal feedback served as an additional form of evaluation.

#### Participants' Evaluation of the Job Readiness Workshop

During the planning of the study, I designed a workshop evaluation form to reflect the workshop objectives and the intended learning outcomes for students. I asked students to complete this evaluation form and give their honest opinions about the workshop. I asked them not to sign the evaluation form. I also gave them the choice to opt out of completing the evaluation form, although I did explain the value of their input in helping me to assess the learning experience. Students handed in their evaluation forms face down on the desk as they left the workshop to further ensure anonymity. One student left the workshop early due to illness and, therefore, did not complete an evaluation. All remaining 34 students completed evaluations.

The workshop evaluation form was based on the evaluation forms regularly used by the AUC Students' Union for courses. I also included suggestions from Caffarella (1994), such as providing room for additional comments and including evaluation questions on content, format, and the effectiveness of the facilitator.

Based on 34 evaluation forms submitted, it was clear that there was overall satisfaction with the workshops. The following observations give a sense of the themes that emerged. First, students who had been in the workshop indicated a strong feeling of preparedness in terms of employers' expectations, job search techniques, and interview techniques. One student noted, "I am more confident in job searching because I know

what I should and shouldn't say to an employer and how to be prepared." Another commented, "This workshop will help me more with an interview and job search and it will help me in what an employer is looking for." Second, participants said that the information was relevant to their field of study. One said, "I have learned a lot about this trade in finding employment and now will know what the employer expects from us." Another noted, "Facilitator did her research well and was able to answer questions about the trade." One simply wrote, "Relevant information."

There was also unanimous agreement that the material was useful, practical, and improved students' understanding of the subject matter. One wrote, "I learned how to approach people at the interview, I also learned how to use the Internet for job searching." This student also said, "The teacher had also taught me how to make up a resume properly, and I know how to write up a cover letter for my resume. I also know how to turn a question around to my benefit." Another commented, "I think the workshop was very good. It was informative, and quite interesting. I went to a workshop like this before and it was not half as interesting or informative." One commented, "I thought the information was of great value and I am definitely more confident about looking for work."

Students also indicated a sense of strengthened confidence as a result of participating in the workshop. One student said, "She has given me the ability to sit through an interview without being so nervous and feel more confident about being able to answer questions with a positive attitude and clear response." Another said, "Some of

the things I learned today were things that I didn't know employers were looking for. I can be more confident in my job search. Thanks for the knowledge."

Fifth, students observed certain adult education principles in action during the workshop, including the use of a variety of presentation (teaching) styles, an openness to students' comments and questions, respect for students' contribution, and an attempt at clarity in presentation. Comments included: "The facilitator knew what she was doing and she was open to everyone's opinion and didn't reject anyone's opinion," and, "She made the class feel very comfortable in discussing subjects outloud."

Finally, there was a genuine sense of appreciation for the workshop overall. One student wrote, "Jodi put a lot of time and effort in preparing her materials and research. It paid off. She is a professional." Another said, "I would like to attend another workshop at a more advanced level from this speaker." None of the comments received were negative.

#### Findings from the Employer Visits to Class

Students seemed to place a high value on the information that came directly from employers in their evaluations of the speakers, even when employers reiterated information presented in the workshop. These included comments such as, "Having some employers come to our class made me aware of how to talk to them, what they are looking for, and how I would present myself to them. It was a good experience and I think it helped everyone." Another said, "it gave me some good insight into the dealership aspect of the trade and how the service writer and the mechanic have to be a well rounded team to keep business going." Another commented, "I felt it was very

interesting having employers come in to talk to us and we now have a bit more insight as to what they expect and want from us.” Again, other than the student who commented that the employers’ information was only specific to their places of business, there were no negative evaluations of the employer visits.

#### Community Work Experience Evaluation

During the weeks of March 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1999--approximately 6 weeks after the workshops--the students began their long awaited community work experience. I conducted my post-placement evaluations following this. They were completed by 12 students who had participated in the job readiness workshop and 12 students who had not participated in the workshop. The follow-up completed with the 12 students who participated in the job readiness workshop focused specifically on the effectiveness and usefulness of the workshop in terms of how job ready they felt for their placement. The follow-up with the 12 students who did not participate in the workshop also focused on their sense of job readiness. I discuss the methodology on how I conducted this next.

#### Follow-up with Participants in the Job Readiness Workshop

The work placement follow up was conducted on Tuesday April 6, 1999. I put the names of all 20 workshop participants in a hat and I randomly chose 6 heavy duty and 6 automotive students to complete the work placement follow-up survey. Of the 12 chosen, 11 were male and one was female. I gave each instructor a list of the students selected to participate in the placement evaluation and they handed out and collected the evaluation forms on my behalf.



The following comments are reflective of comments on the feedback surveys. First, all 12 (100%) of the students surveyed said they were better prepared as a result of attending the workshop. Comments included, “The workshop gave me a better understanding of what to do while looking for a place to work,” and “I felt more confident and prepared for possible questions employers would ask and reverting it to reveal something about myself.” Second, students frequently indicated having benefitted from the interview portion of the workshop. Some comments included, “I had the right answers to say for his questions.” Another student said, “The questions you gathered gave me an idea about what to expect. I had no idea.” One student commented, “By taking what I learned in general from the workshop, I was more confident in myself.”

Finally, the minority of students who indicated they did not benefit from portions of the workshop were indicating that they already had the related knowledge prior to the workshop. Or, they said they did not need this workshop information to obtain their work placement. For instance, one commented, “I had my placement before the workshop.” Another student wrote, “It didn’t really make a difference about some things where I already had a background.” There was a total of two out of 12 (20%) who fell into this category.

#### Follow-up with Non-participants

As described in the introductory chapter, students in the industrial mechanical and millwright and machinist pre-employment programs also completed a community work experience, but they did not participate in my job readiness workshops. The instructors arranged the community work experiences for these students; therefore, the

students did not engage in any form of job search or interviewing experience. This group acted as my comparison group because they could give feedback on how job ready they felt going into a work placement without being afforded access to the job readiness curriculum. Students in the motor vehicle body repairer class were not asked to participate in the survey because their instructor informed me that AUC had been contacted by community employers directly to recruit students from this class.

To assess the expressed job readiness of the non-participants, 12 students were randomly chosen. Specifically, after I received their instructors' permission, I went to the industrial mechanical and millwright class and the machinist class and explained my study. I then requested volunteers to participate in my survey. I chose the first six students from each class who raised their hands. This process gave a level of random sampling.

The following findings are representative of the students who completed the community work experience but did not participate in my job readiness workshop. Eleven of the 12 who responded felt they would have benefitted from a job readiness workshop. Their comments about the value of job readiness training included: "When you graduate, you will know a little about what to do [regarding job search]." Another commented, "Someone with experience could benefit a person with no experience writing cover letters and resumes," and another said, "It shows how real work is." Second, more than half the students surveyed indicated that they felt a need to know more or were unsure about their need to know. They wanted more information about resume development, cover letter preparation, approaching employers, and preparing for

interviews. For instance, one student said, "It would help break the ice on some of the question I have," and another student simply wrote, "Never done it before." The 12 responses were consistent in saying that this group had wanted more job readiness information.

### Employer Follow-up Survey

I surveyed employers who hosted my students on their community work experience and asked them to rate the job readiness of my students. I selected 24 employers using the methodology discussed next.

### Survey Method for Employers

Twenty-four employers were randomly chosen from the total of 35 who hosted the students from my job readiness workshops. To make the selections, I first wrote out a complete list of hosting employers and then randomly chose 12 heavy duty employers' names and 12 automotive employers' names from the list. It was at this point that support from the trades department chair proved invaluable. I wrote a cover letter to accompany the employer follow-up survey and asked the chair to provide his signature to give the letter more credibility and professionalism. He willingly agreed to co-sign the letter with me and provided letterhead to give it an official appearance.

The letter explained the purpose of the survey, ensured confidentiality, and requested the employer to return it in an accompanying self-addressed, stamped envelope. Employer follow-up surveys were mailed on April 10, 1999. After 3 weeks, 13 of 24 (54%) surveys were returned. At this point, I sent all 24 employers a second survey. I re-contacted all 24 because confidentiality prohibited knowing which 13

employers returned their first surveys. The second cover letter was accompanied by the original letter. I asked those who did not return the original survey to complete the enclosed copy. I also thanked those who had already returned their surveys. After another 3-week period, I received an additional seven surveys, bringing the total employers participating in the follow-up survey to 20 of 24 (83%).

Each question asked the employer to rate the job readiness of the student whom he or she hosted for a community work experience. None of the respondents chose “not applicable” for any of the questions. This suggested that all questions were appropriate to the study. The design of the employer survey required employers to rank students on a scale of 1 to 5--1 being “poor” and 5 being “excellent.”

I was surprised to find that one employer chose not to complete the employer follow-up survey and, instead, followed up with a letter expressing her disappointment with the job readiness of my students who had participated in the workshops. By expressing her discontent, she further strengthened the case for the need for a more formal job readiness curriculum. She wrote, “Neither student presented me with a resume or cover letter which indicated to me they were not interested. . . . I hope you will stress to your students in the future that this is an important factor.” In this case, the students did not demonstrate transfer of learning and, unfortunately, chose not to use the materials they had developed.

Results of the employer follow-up survey indicated that not all of the students seemed to apply all of the information presented in the job readiness workshop. However, the majority who attended the job readiness workshop were clearly job ready.

Based on these employer evaluations, my students appeared strongest with regard to their interview skills and initial contact skills. When evaluated on their interview skills, all 20 (100%) of my students were rated by the employers as being “good” or “very good” on the questionnaire. Comments included: “A bit shy—but that’s better than overbearing,” and “Gave a brief overview of his course and equipment he had worked on.” They were rated weakest with regard to offering information about their strengths and abilities; only 6 of 20 (30%) students received a ranking of “very good” on this point. In addition, the employer feedback indicated that my students presented themselves well in terms of the quality of their resumes; fourteen (70%) received a ranking of “good,” or “very good,” and four (20%) received “excellent.” My students scored well on their cover letters with 16 (80%) receiving “good” or “very good,” and two (10%) receiving “excellent.”

Overall, my students presented themselves as job ready to employers. A full 19 (95%) of my students received “good” or “very good” in terms of their overall job readiness.

### Informal Evaluation

I received forms of informal feedback on three occasions. The heavy duty instructor stopped me in the hall after he had completed the monitoring of his (and my) students on their community work experience and said, “I don’t know if this has anything to do with your workshop or not, but overall, I got much more positive feedback from employers this year than I did last year.” This was significant for purposes of my evaluation because the instructor had visited each student on placement and spoke with

an employer in each case. This was, in fact, a larger representation of workshop participants than my follow-up sample of 12 students discussed earlier.

Another form of informal evaluation arose when I spoke to an employer who had been approached by one of my students for a placement—it turned out this was the female student. Toward the end of the conversation, he expressed how impressed he was with the contact he had with this student. He pointed to the student's strong job readiness skills as a factor in agreeing to provide and supervise the work experience. When he completed my employer survey, he explained to me that he deals with people approaching him for work on a daily basis. He was particularly impressed with this student's job readiness skills. The fact that this employer had a lot of experience upon which to base his judgement and the fact that this female student had concerns about her acceptance in the workplace made this even more meaningful.

A third example came from a workshop participant and occurred approximately 2-weeks after the first workshop. A participant made an appointment to have me review his resume and cover letter. During the meeting, he explained that he contacted three employers in the hope of securing a work placement. He told me that he had no problem speaking on his own behalf and that he was very pleased with himself. He also told me that this was very unlike him and that he was surprised that he was able to carry out the task. When I asked him why he thought he was able to accomplish a task which was so out of character for him, he replied, "It's because of you." In short, all of the indications from the informal feedback were that the study was a success, complementing the formal evaluation data discussed earlier.

In the following chapter, I discuss my study experience in relation to relevant adult education literature. In doing so, I analyze and interpret the findings of my research as an adult education study and reflect on my own learning.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DISCUSSION OF THE OUTCOME: ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

In this study, I attempted to address the following research questions: First, what are the needs of the trades students in the trades education department of AUC and what are the job readiness expectations of prospective employers in the region? Second, how can I, as an adult educator, plan a job readiness program for AUC trades students that addresses these diverse needs? Third, how can I facilitate such a job readiness program for AUC trades students? I decided that three conditions were necessary in order to demonstrate that the trades department needed to incorporate a job readiness component into their curriculum. These included: (a) agreement and support from the trades department chair, instructors, and students on the need for job readiness training, (b) evidence that local employers expected job readiness skills when hiring new employees and, (c) evidence that job readiness training would benefit AUC's trades students. Once the need for a job readiness curriculum was established, I could plan the content of such a component and facilitate a workshop. Evaluation was central to the study. I engaged in both formative and summative evaluation, as well as formal and informal evaluation. Formative evaluation served as means of making appropriate changes throughout the facilitation process. Summative evaluation encompassed the entire study, as will now be discussed.



## Workforce Preparedness Literature and My Study

The problem I identified has been widely recognized and discussed in the adult education literature. Preparing for the current workforce requires a dynamic approach to learning. Evers, Rush, and Berdrow (1998) explain that the contemporary workforce requires a proactive approach to learning if graduates from post-secondary institutions are to meet the demands of a changing workforce. As they say, “Students and graduates need to think in terms of preparing themselves for lifelong employability (as opposed to lifelong employment) through lifelong learning” (p. xviii). The Employability Skills Profile (1997) gives a long list of skills sought by employers when hiring new employees and discusses the specific skills employers want to have incorporated into employee training. According to the Employability Skills Profile, in addition to basic foundational abilities required to perform tasks, employers look for employees with personal management and teamwork skills and the ability to apply foundational skills. The pre-employment trades department at AUC provides an opportunity for aspiring trades students to develop academic, personal management, and teamwork skills in an applied trades context. However, if AUC trades students are to get a chance to use these skills in preparation for the workforce, it was my belief that a job readiness workshop was needed.

## Needs Assessment

Through consultation with my St FX advisor and by reading the relevant literature, I recognized the necessity of engaging in needs assessment in order to identify students' felt needs and the normative needs as expressed by the AUC instructors and local employers. Identifying the felt needs of the trades students was directly reflective of Boyle's (1981) description of a felt need as a want or desire. He underscores the importance of having program planners understand the felt needs of the learners. Knowles (1980) presents the same approach to student-centered planning and refers to felt needs as "interests." His perspective emphasizes the importance of incorporating felt needs into adult education facilitation because of the voluntary nature of adult learning. As such, responding to felt needs can enhance the likelihood of participation and the effectiveness of the learning activity. Because my job readiness workshops were completely voluntary, it was clearly important to identify and respond to the students' felt needs for their work placement.

I also appreciated that felt needs were only one indication of need related to job readiness. I recognized the importance of identifying what Boyle (1981) refers to as normative needs and what Knowles (1980) refers to as interests and educational needs. Both employers and instructors were instrumental in identifying the job readiness skills they believed students ought to have for the contemporary workforce. My employer surveys and meetings with the department chair and instructors allowed me to add their perceptions of need into the workshop content. In attempting to judiciously include

needs, I was seeking to find a balance of real needs, as discussed by Boyle (1981) and Knowles (1980).

As I began the planning process, I was very much guided by the theoretical perspectives of Cervero and Wilson (1994). They describe the political nature of program planning and the resulting considerations for a responsible program planner. Cervero and Wilson highlight the need for negotiation of interests among those impacted by the program planning process. With this in mind, I believed that the success of my workshop depended largely on the support of the administration and faculty at AUC. They would be directly impacted by my work and, as such, their support was essential.

During the first meeting I had with the department chair, I received overwhelming support. Mr. Smith told me about a meeting he had recently attended where the needs of the trades industry were identified. He said, "We were told that what employers want most in employees is punctuality and communication skills." I quickly responded, "You know, those are some of the skills identified in the Employability Skills Profile, and that's the kind of information I want to talk with students about." He was very pleased that I wanted to address needs that were identified at his meetings with representatives from industry. It was obvious that I was considering and responding to the department chair's needs and that we were agreed on the types of skills that the students would need.

I also required support from the instructors whose students would be participants in my workshops. Guided by the recommendations of Cervero and Wilson (1994), I understood the need to negotiate with instructors to arrive at a mutually acceptable

program. The instructors were enthusiastic. The automotive and heavy duty instructors both gave me detailed contact lists of employers whom they believed would be valuable participants in my employer survey. The instructors asked me to emphasize communication skills and positive attitude in my workshops. One instructor actually participated in one workshop. These were negotiation steps that Cervero and Wilson say are critical in program planning.

Involving students in the program planning was central to conducting a successful study. Knowles (1980) supports the notion of involving participants in the entire planning process, including the identification of needs, setting objectives, designing and carrying out the learning plan, and program evaluation. Boyle's (1981) notion of involving learners in program planning ensures identification and consideration of their felt needs. Wlodkowski (1993) also identifies the value of including learners in the planning process as a means of responding to their needs. According to Wlodkowski, participants' motivation to learn will be enhanced if they see the learning opportunity as a means of meeting their needs. Prior to my workshop, students participated in a needs assessment as a way to identify their individual skills and level of knowledge. They also discussed the information they wanted for job readiness in a written form. For instance, one survey question asked students to explain what they would do to prepare for an interview. This gave me a good indication of their current knowledge.

Seeing a discrepancy between learners' current and desired proficiencies provides a rationale for engagement in learning, according to Knox's (1986) proficiency theory. Based on this theory, I had hoped that students would identify a need to participate in my

job readiness workshop. A workshop participant rate of 35 out of a potential of 41 (85%) students indicated to me that students had identified a need to attend my workshop. The fact that the workshop was offered on a voluntary basis reinforced this conclusion.

My needs assessment also included local employers' expectations regarding job readiness skills when hiring new employees. Local employers ultimately played a vital role in my program planning. The employers whom I requested to participate in my survey were very accommodating. Not a single employer refused to participate.

The data collected from employers created much of the content for my workshop. This is consistent with Knowles's (1980) theory of andragogy and Boyle's (1981) definition of "normative needs." During my interviews with employers, conversation always centered around the need for lifelong learning. For example, some of the advice from employers to aspiring technicians included, "Be willing to learn," "It's always a learning process. You don't stop learning once you graduate," and "Be willing to say that you can't do something, but that you are willing to learn." Cross (1981) refers to the need for lifelong learning in terms of responding to accelerating technological, demographic, and social changes. Of particular significance to my study is her reference to technological change. She suggests the need to keep pace with technological advances can be addressed through lifelong learning. Many of the employers who participated in my study made reference to changes in technology that directly impact their work.

Many employers were inadvertently supporting Candy's (1991) belief in the need for self-directed, lifelong learning. One stated, "Education is probably the most important thing to consider. Things are so complex today and you need the ability to

read and understand.” Another said, “Be willing to learn things you’ve never touched in school.” When one employer was asked if his own expectations of employees had changed over the past 10 years when considering someone for employment, he said, “I’ve learned to look more for interest in learning than for experience.”

Employers in my study also made numerous references to the concepts presented in the Employability Skills Profile (1997). The need for personal management skills was apparent when employers engaged in the interview process. Many employers said they could tell a lot about an applicant’s approach to work by the way he or she responded to questions during an interview. For example, the most frequent response to what impresses the employer most in an interview was, “A good attitude.” The second most common response was, “Somebody who seems interested in learning.” Other skills mentioned by my employers included, “Honesty,” “Somebody with a plan for themselves,” and “Personality.” These attributes can be found in the Employability Skills Profile.

The academic skill described in the Employability Skills Profile that employers in my study identified most often was, “Good verbal presentation.” Other academic skills that impressed my employers and are in the Employability Skills Profile were: “Being able to get the idea across,” and somebody who can, “Think off the top of their head.” One employer described his preference for a worker who could perform on the job as compared to someone who could perform well on academic tests. He was looking for the critical thinking skills discussed in the Employability Skills Profile. He said, “I need a thinker—a troubleshooter, to read manuals and fill out work orders.”

My employers talked a lot about teamwork skills, a central component of the Employability Skills Profile. For instance, employers said they would consider hiring someone who shows “a willingness to learn the way things are done in this particular place” and someone who has a “proper attitude—not a ‘know it all’.”

One of my employers unknowingly summed up the components of the Employability Skills Profile as related to the automotive industry when he spoke about trends in employers’ expectations. He said, “Now [we] expect more professionalism. In the past you worked on cars; now you work on cars, talk to customers, and writing is important.” As Tetreault (1997) argues, preparing for the world of work requires learning the use of personal and social skills to apply academic knowledge acquired in the classroom.

Foot and Stoffman (1996) describe changes in the workforce resulting from changes in demographics and technology. They suggest that generalists who can adapt quickly to change will most readily meet the demands of our contemporary workforce. Employers involved in my study both supported and contradicted this concept. Most of the employers I interviewed talked about the impact of technology on their trades and made numerous references to keeping abreast of technological change. One employer said, “Things are changing and you have to be willing to change with it.” Another specifically recommended, “Be a generalist—you have to know lots. The more you learn, the better you’ll be to an employer.” On the other hand, some employers thought the impact of technological advancement is so diverse that the only response is to concentrate on a particular area. For instance, one employer commented, “Speciality is a

big thing--somebody with a speciality has a better chance.” This is in contradiction to Foot and Stoffman’s assertions. No matter which side of this issue one endorses, the need for lifelong learning as a means of staying current is a necessity in today’s workforce.

Engaging in needs assessment was a means of addressing my first research question: What are the needs of the trades students in the trades education department of AUC and what are the job readiness expectations of prospective employers in the region? My second research question: how can I, as an adult educator, plan a job readiness program for AUC trades students that addresses these diverse needs, is explored in the next section.

### **Significant Program Planning Models**

The time I spent planning my job readiness workshop was the key to its success. My efforts and success substantiate Murk and Wells’s (1986) observation that effective planning, and the success of a program, are directly related. I relied on a number of specific components of the various program planning models to guide my work; however, Caffarella’s (1994) Interactive Program Planning Model was the most helpful in the long run. This was because it accounts for flexibility in program planning--something I worked hard to include. On the other hand, I found her concept of a linear, step-by-step, approach necessary in the beginning because I was a novice program planner. At the beginning of my study I found I had to be able to conceptualize and



present the entire process in a logical, linear, form in order to convince those who would be involved that I had a clear vision of my study. This was also important when I was explaining to instructors what I hoped to accomplish with their students. For example, one instructor made a suggestion, "Put something on paper and drop it off so that I can read it and get an idea of what you're planning to do." I needed a clear direction of what my program plan entailed.

At the same time Murk and Wells (1986), and Caffarella (1994) in particular, underscore the importance of being open to the probability that the steps outlined in my program plan might not unfold as expected. I now discuss these two observations in more detail.

#### The Systems Approach Model

The Systems Approach Model discussed by Murk and Wells (1986) gives a series of five planning components and accounts for a balance between flexibility and creativity when implementing the steps. This model also considers the influence of administrators, instructors, planners, and participants and described my situation perfectly. The five components of my study included: needs assessment, instructional planning and development, administration and budget information, implementation of the program, and evaluation. I had not thought of administrative and budget considerations until I read Murk and Wells's work. As a planner, identifying these two component forced me to make arrangements for the budget associated with my study and the time from work that would be necessary to conduct the workshops. These simple issues could have interfered

with my study had I not planned for them as components of the Systems Approach Model.

While budgeting items were not major, they were important to the success of the study. They included the cost of paper for photocopying handouts, stamps, envelopes, and the colored paper for my employer follow-up survey. I arranged refreshments for break times during each workshop and gifts for the employers who participated in the workshops. I believe that not being prepared and not arranging for the cost of these types of items would have seriously weakened my workshops. The budget considerations in the Systems Approach Model created an opportunity for me to conduct more effective planning. Refreshments were a means of showing appreciation to participants and they were, in fact, greatly appreciated. The refreshments were mentioned several times on the workshop evaluation and in person during the day. The cards and coffee mugs for the speakers were also appreciated. These would have been last minute considerations or would have been ignored had I not used Murk and Wells's model.

#### The Interactive Program Planning Model

The most significant long term impact on my planning process came from Caffarella's (1994) Interactive Planning Model. Her model offers a guided approach to program planning. Most importantly, the flexibility offered within this model helped me let my program fit the model, as opposed to making the model fit my program. For example, being comfortable with flexibility, I recognized the need to re-evaluate the use of the video during the interview portion of the workshop. When I consulted with the students and agreed to remove the video exercise, I understood this to be effective

facilitation, not poor planning. Flexibility proved invaluable in the automotive workshop as well when, for instance, I specifically drew their attention to the value of having three different instructors. My suggestion to have them view this as positive by working it into the transferable skills portion of the workshop was helpful to them. This was not required in the case of the heavy duty students and I believe, therefore, that flexibility was needed on my part as the facilitator. Two components of the Interactive Planning Model were of particular significance to my study: formulating evaluation plans and preparing for the transfer of learning.

Consideration for formulating the evaluation plan became integral to the planning of my study. Caffarella's model was the first one I found that identified the need for a plan for evaluation, as opposed to evaluation as the final step in planning. Once I incorporated evaluation into the planning process, the particulars of the program became clearer. For example, when I decided that I would engage in a follow-up survey of employers who supervised my students while on their work placements as a means of measuring the success of my study, I could begin to structure the timing of my study accordingly. I began to consider employer feedback and could estimate the time frame for feedback forms to be mailed if employers were to have time to reflect on the work of the students. I could begin to map out the sequencing and timing of each activity.

Planning for evaluation not only structured the time frame of the study, it also structured the learning objectives and learning outcomes and, as such, the entire workshop agenda. For instance, when I was planning for the workshop evaluation, I was reminded by the Interactive Planning Model that I was required to clearly identify my

intended outcomes. This, in turn, gave structure to my workshop layout and approach. I saw that I needed to measure success against my stated intended outcomes.

Caffarella's concept of transfer of learning was also a major component of my study. This step in her model requires the program planner to consider how participants will apply what they have learned. She says that "developing transfer-of-learning plans is tied directly to the program evaluation component of the planning process" (p. 116). In addition, she suggests that program planners need to consider key players in measuring the transfer of learning; this speaks directly to my study design.

Since participants in my workshop were expected to apply what they learned with their community employers, these employers became the best resources for measuring the transfer of learning. As was seen in the informal evaluation found in chapter 3, I experienced this when I contacted one of the workshop participant's supervisors regarding an unrelated issue. The supervisor took the opportunity to tell me his reaction to the student's transfer of learning. Referring to the one female student in the study, he said, "I was very impressed with one of your students the other day. She approached me about her work placement and she was very enthusiastic, was prepared with a resume and cover letter, and showed lots of initiative." This informal feedback was the first reaction that I had from an employer about one of the workshop participants and it proved to me that, for that student at least, the transfer of learning had occurred.

## **Facilitating Effective Learning**

The adult education literature relevant to how adults learn was also critical to the design and implementation of my study. The next section connects literature relevant to adult learning theories and philosophies with my third research question: How can I facilitate such a job readiness program for AUC trades students?

### Humanistic Theory

As was seen in chapter 2, Cross (1981) describes humanistic learning theory as an approach to adult education where learning will occur if the facilitator provides a nourishing, encouraging environment. This will happen because people have a natural tendency to learn. Humanistic theory promotes a student-centered approach to the facilitation of learning. The needs of the learners determine the process. This approach to facilitating learning greatly influenced my thinking as a program planner in this study, and I believe the concept of humanistic learning theory has a central role in all adult education programming irrespective of the setting.

Practicing a humanistic approach to learning requires a respect for learners. I tried to model this from the inception of the workshop by including students in the identification of their felt needs. I practiced this in the delivery of my workshop by promoting voluntary participation, respecting the opinions and comments of participants, and encouraging student participation throughout the workshop. I based the workshop agenda on a humanistic approach to learning by including small group discussion where students could share and create information. I sequenced tasks so that students could

have an understanding of what was required of them before they moved on to a more complicated task. I shared my own experiences as a job searcher and interviewer. I also employed flexibility by rearranging the agenda according to participants' needs. For instance, I immediately responded to the students' request in the first workshop that smoke breaks were required and I made a point of incorporating such breaks into my second workshop. I removed the video portion of the workshop plan when students expressed their discontent with this style of information delivery. These are examples of my use of the basic principles of humanism.

### Operant Conditioning

This theory also found a place in my classroom. I had a difficult participant in my workshop; namely, a learner I called a heckler. I practiced what Merriam and Caffarella's (1991) describe as operant conditioning. A basic principle of behaviorist learning theory, they suggest that operant conditioning is a means of encouraging or discouraging behaviors through the presence or absence of reinforcement. This student was continually making comments from the back of the room to elicit laughter from others. I realized that I needed to respond so that I could discourage his negative comments, but had to do so without discouraging the rest of the class from making constructive comments. Nor did I want to alienate this student. I first brought attention to his negative behavior, then used operant conditioning by finding something positive in his comments that supported my topic. I turned his intended humor into a valuable contribution and was glad to see that he became a more serious student after this.

### Enhanced Motivation

One of the facilitation strategies I used in my workshop reflected Wlodkowski's (1993) concept of enhanced motivation. He believes that all individuals are motivated and that effective facilitation can actually enhance motivation. His most relevant concept for me was that there are four cornerstones of excellence for being a motivating instructor: expertise, empathy, enthusiasm, and clarity. All four attributes played a significant role in my facilitation. However, expertise seemed to be the most important to my students. As Wlodkowski argues, "There is no substitute for thoroughly knowing our topic" (p. 19). This certainly proved to be true in my study.

During the needs assessment, students expressed an interest in receiving relevant information. One student wrote, "Make a workshop that is tailored to our needs." It was obvious from the outset that students wanted information that was meaningful and they expected me to have the expertise to do this. As an effective facilitator, this required me to gain useful information to pass on to them. I brought much of my job readiness information from my own early work and collected new information from employers and my additional reading. Comments from the students indicated that this was both effective and appreciated. One student wrote: "The facilitator knew what she was doing," and "[The] facilitator did her research well and was able to answer questions about the trade." Gaining some degree of expertise relevant to the subject matter made me more comfortable during the facilitation process. I believe this, in turn, increased my ability to enhance their motivation.

Empathy, Wlodkowski's second cornerstone, was definitely significant in my workshop delivery. I could see students' hesitancy in talking about their experiences and, since I had engaged in employer contacts myself as a means of gathering employer input, I was able to share my experiences with them. In addition, I openly shared my own past job search experiences, which they seemed to appreciate. One participant commented: "The information you presented and the personal information was very valuable to me. I now feel confident in finding a job and how to present myself."

Enthusiasm also played a role in my ability to motivate my participants. I found it easy to be enthusiastic because I believe in the relationship between strong job readiness skills and employability. My belief was reinforced through the literature and from information collected during my employer interviews. One direct indication of how enthusiasm impacted motivation is shown in one participant's comments. Comparing the impact of my delivery to others who made him fall asleep, he said, "I stayed awake all morning and afternoon! Jodi speaks and I ask questions. Thank you very much." Of the 34 participants who were asked for their feedback on the facilitator's enthusiasm, all 34 "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that I was enthusiastic.

Finally, clarity means that the information taught is easy to understand. This directly related to the organization of the workshop and my own presentation style. All 34 participants were asked if the facilitator presented the information in an organized way, and all 34 "agreed" or "strongly agreed." In addition, all 34 were asked if the facilitator spoke clearly and was easy to understand. All 34 "agreed" or "strongly agreed."



In sum, there were indications that students' motivation was enhanced during the study. One student commented, "I feel that I am now able to go into an interview and feel confident in answering the questions correctly." Another wrote, "Excellent presentation. Should help students find work! Thank you." One direct example of enhanced motivation occurred during the workshop. After lunch on the day of one of the workshops, a participant returned and immediately asked when we would be finished for the day. I assumed it was a reflection of disinterest; however, he explained, "I was so motivated by this morning that during lunch I went to three employers and I have to go back and see one at 4 o'clock."

### **Evaluation of My Three Research Questions**

As described in Caffarella's (1994) transfer of learning concept, evaluation is a direct means of determining whether or not newly acquired knowledge has been applied. This is usually in the form of summative evaluation--that which occurs at the end of the educational intervention. Caffarella describes formative evaluation as ongoing evaluation and evaluation in process. My study utilized both forms of evaluation as the means for assessing my three research questions.

Formative evaluation occurred when I used information acquired during the first workshop and applied it to the second workshop. For instance, in the morning of the first workshop, I was reminded that I should have additional breaks for those participants who smoke. This need also was identified in the written student evaluations from the first

workshop. As a result, when I began the second workshop a week later, I asked participants to alert me when appropriate smoke breaks were needed and I accommodated this need. Another example of formative evaluation was derived from my own insights. As a result of completing the first workshop, I learned that some adjustments had to be made to the agenda for the second workshop because not all of the components could be covered within the given time frame. My approach to this was to present the agenda as originally intended, discuss the time we would need, and then allow participants to choose which components would be included or excluded.

The remainder of the evaluation process was summative in nature. Participants completed evaluation forms upon completion of the workshop. In addition, a random sampling of students who participated in my workshops and completed the work placements were surveyed to evaluate the impact of my workshops on their job readiness. Another random sampling of students who did not participate in my workshops, but completed AUC work placements, were surveyed to assess their sense of job readiness. Finally, a random sampling of employers who supervised my students were sent a formal survey to evaluate the students' job readiness. I also received informal feedback from one of these employers as well.

As described in chapter 3, overall, students who participated in my workshops felt job ready upon completion of their 2-week community work experience. However, students who did not participate in my workshops did not feel job ready entering or during their 2-week community work experience. The formal feedback from employers who supervised my workshop participants indicated that the majority of my students

were job ready. In addition, informal feedback from an instructor, one employer, and various students verified that the workshops enhanced the job readiness skills of the workshop participants.

In summary, both formative and summative evaluation indicated that my research questions had been satisfactorily addressed and I feel confident that AUC, the students, and employers would benefit from a job readiness component in the trades curriculum. My study supported the program planning, learning, and evaluation literature. However, the employment literature that emphasizes the need for skill diversity was not always supported by employers who participated in my employer survey questionnaire. According to Foot and Stoffman (1996), employees must have a wide diversity of skills if they are to be successful in the workplace. While this may be the case on a universal level, in this study, employers were interested in the skills that were germane to their workplace. This point is taken up again in recommendations for further research.

### **Conclusions**

Selman and Dampier (1991) describe learning as the end product of education. Feedback from students and employers in my study indicated that my students had gained new confidence and skills as a result of my educational intervention. In Boucouvalas and Krupp's (1989) description of adult development and learning, they discuss the elements of information, knowledge, skill, and wisdom development. Not only did the first three elements of learning occur for my workshop participants, but, as a facilitator and learner,

I also grew from the experience. And, I think I gained a level of new insight, if not wisdom, through this study.

Upon reflection, I can identify five areas where I improved my practice. As a result of the study, I became capable of acquiring new information through the use of both primary and secondary research skills. On the level of secondary skills, I learned much more about the effective use of library resources and, once collected, I became astute at critiquing the information obtained. For example, upon researching various approaches to program planning, I learned the technique of matching the strengths and weaknesses of each model in order to determine which model best suited my study. More importantly, I learned to combine the strengths of different models rather than feeling confined to only one in the literature. I used Caffarella's (1994) Interactive Planning Model, Murk and Wells's (1986) Systems Approach Model, and components of behaviorism. In addition, I strengthened my primary research skills while conducting my study. I learned much more about identification of felt and normative needs and the balancing of both in program planning.

I also learned more about the program planning process. In addition to becoming familiar with the relevant literature, my most significant learning happened as a result of my role as program planner. Learning about and practicing the need for flexibility, creativity, and responsiveness in program planning enhanced my organizational, public relations, and planning skills immeasurably.

I sought to learn more about contemporary job readiness skills. The literature and my interviews with employers helped me achieve this goal. I also hoped to acquire the

skills to facilitate learning more effectively among a diverse group of adults. This was very important to me. Reading the literature relevant to definitions of learning and about learning theories made the concept of learning easier to comprehend. Understanding that both behaviorism and humanism can both be used in an adult education study was very enlightening because they had seemed so diametrically opposed before. Learning ways to include both was important to meeting my own learning goals. Cross's (1981) CAL Model, Knowles's (1980) concept of andragogy, and Knox's (1986) theory of proficiency all illustrated the various conditions that bring adults to learning encounters. These helped me build my skills to work with a group of learners with a wide range of backgrounds and ages.

I especially wanted to learn more about motivating learners. I was very struck by Wlodkowski's (1993) concept of ways to enhance motivation and used them as tools to enhance the motivation of my learners during my study. I found his approach to be very practical and I use them on a regular basis today.

The three components outlined in my research questions were addressed. The job readiness needs of students in the AUC trades department and the expectations of prospective employers were identified and incorporated into the job readiness workshop. Evaluation of my study indicated a high degree of program planning and facilitation success. My personal growth and these successes lead to my recommendations for practice and further study.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

1. The trades department at AUC should incorporate a job readiness component into its trades training curriculum. This study has confirmed that students would benefit from such a component and would help prepare them to find employment. In addition, I believe such a component would help participating employers.
2. If a job readiness component is added to the trades training curriculum, it should be offered throughout the year rather than on a single day. Students need time to apply new knowledge and bring their experiences back to the facilitator and group members.
3. Students should be active participants in gathering information from local employers as a means of practicing employer contacts. They could each choose an employer to interview and bring the information back to the rest of the group. This would increase the information obtained and add to the appreciation of diversity among employers.
4. The trades department should add the demonstration of job readiness skills to the standard AUC evaluation form given to employers who supervise students during their community work experience. This would further demonstrate the need to practice such skills and knowledge in the AUC trades program and would help inform AUC on an ongoing basis.
5. All students in the pre-employment trades department should engage in resume preparation, cover letter preparation, job search, and interviewing even if they are not required to obtain their own work placement. Even if such employability skills are only

simulated for the purpose of learning, students would graduate with knowledge and skills that could help them throughout their careers.

6. Employers should play an active role in delivering job readiness information to students. Students in my study appreciated both the speakers and feedback from employers because this seemed to represent the “real work world” to them. This could be accomplished through ongoing employer visits to class.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

If others were to take this research further, I would recommend the following:

1. Conduct long term follow-up studies with workshop participants to evaluate their success in finding actual employment after graduation.
2. Develop a study model whereby a single class of trades students is divided into one group that acquires job readiness training and one that does not. All of the students would then be followed-up on their personal sense of job readiness and their ability to find and acquire a community placement as part of their program. This could be a working model for trades programs.
3. Design a follow-up survey with employers that asks them to compare the job readiness of students whom they supervised on a work placement to someone walking in off the street in search of employment. This would provide another element of comparison.

4. Conduct long term follow-up studies with students and employers to assess transfer of learning
5. Involve a greater number of employers in survey questionnaires to expand data.
6. Expand this study beyond my local geographic area and compare the findings on a wider scale.
7. Further research would be helpful in contrasting what employers look for when hiring employees and what skills are actually valued in the workforce over time. Is a diversity of skills an asset in the long run, or is specialization the asset new employees and training institutions should be emphasizing?

In closing, I believe a comment from a student who participated in my workshop sums up the learning that occurred for all involved. What on the surface appeared like a negative comment was actually very accurate and overwhelmingly positive. When asked if the workshop was of benefit in assisting him in the identification of his own strengths and abilities so he could market them to an employer, the student replied, "No, I felt like I was still learning."



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