

THE LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF OLDER ADULTS
AS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how older adults (in this study, adults over 60 years of age) experience learning in classroom settings. In-depth interviews with nine older adults enrolled in degree programs in a university were conducted to elicit their personal narratives of their learning experiences. Participants were asked to keep journals as a means of reflecting on these experiences. Four major themes were identified: life experiences: lost opportunities for facilitating learning, professors as figures of authority, teaching practices: the agony and the ecstasy, and learning: the pathway to self-fulfillment. The model of intellectual and cognitive development as a growth phenomenon was used to interpret the themes. Suggestions were made for research and teaching practice.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Older adult learners are thought to differ from young adult learners in intellectual and cognitive development such that they require different teaching practices to facilitate their learning. Until recently, there were two models of intellectual and cognitive development in adulthood, a stability model and a decrement model. These models have influenced research, teaching practices, and general perspectives on the learning abilities of older adults for many years. A third model is emerging from contemporary research, the growth model. This model provides a new perspective on the learning abilities of older adults and broadens the possibilities for research and teaching practice. Although research findings have demonstrated that certain teaching practices can enhance learning for older adults, seemingly, no one has asked older adults what helps them to learn best. The purpose of this study was to describe how older adults (in this study, adults over 60 years of age) experience learning in classroom settings.

Statement of the Problem

Each model of intellectual and cognitive development in adulthood makes assumptions about the learning needs of older adults and teaching practices that best meet those needs. The stability model asserts that adult intellectual and cognitive development is essentially stable over the life time and, consequently, suggests that adults do not need to be taught differently based on age differences. Until recently, the literature in adult education has not differentiated between adults on the basis of age. However, adult

education has not differentiated between adults on the basis of age. However, adult education has emphasized learner-focused teaching methods which stress the autonomy of the learner in determining instructional processes (Bolton, 1990; Cranton, 1989), and consequently, the assumption may be made that such a perspective will meet the needs of both old and young adults. However, it is not clear to what extent learner-focused teaching methods are used in adult education classes. If educators do not recognize that older adults may have unique needs and what these needs are, instructional strategies chosen may not be appropriate.

The decrement model asserts that adults' intellectual and cognitive abilities decline with age and suggests that teaching practices may need to be different for older adults to ensure effective learning. Although little research has been done to specify clearly the most applicable strategies for facilitating older adult learning (Bolton, 1990), this perspective has led to research focusing on identifying strategies that might diminish or reverse presumed cognitive deficits. The implication of such research is that there may be special teaching strategies to help older adults. However, this research has been criticized for not taking into account individual differences or the multitude of confounding factors, such as social and historical factors, involved in evaluation of outcomes (Bolton, 1990). As well, this research has taken place in laboratory settings. It is not clear that methods proven efficacious in the laboratory will be effective in the classroom. Therefore, such research findings may not address the real needs of older adult learners.

The growth model asserts that intellectual and cognitive abilities develop over the life span based on the experience of dealing with concrete problems and situations in real

life (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Research on practical intelligence, wisdom, and the development of expertise has yielded findings which suggest that adult cognitive development involves new forms of thinking and reasoning that are associated with distinctly adult life tasks (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). In a similar vein, Mezirow (1991) has asserted that aging entails changes reflecting qualitatively different dimensions of context awareness, focus, goal awareness, critical reflectivity and greater integrations of the cognitive dimensions of learning. This suggests that older adults may require different teaching practices from those of young adults for effective learning based not on presumed cognitive deficits but on differences in their developmental levels resulting from their accumulated life experiences. Viewing adult intellectual and cognitive development as growth is a more positive perspective on the learning abilities of older adults. It widens the possibilities for addressing their learning needs and provides a fruitful direction for further research.

If adult cognitive growth is based largely on accumulated life experiences, to gain a better understanding of what teaching practices may be most effective for older adults, their educational experiences must be explored. Seemingly, very few studies have asked older adults specifically how they have experienced learning in classroom settings. This study will address this particular gap. Older adults who are engaged in degree programs at university were asked about their learning experiences. By eliciting personal life stories, this study explored participants' perceptions of factors that affected their learning. Consequently, insight was gained into what older adults think about their learning experiences and teaching practices used. Listening to the experiences of older adult

learners, understanding which teaching practices are effective and which are not from their perspective, contributes both to our knowledge of learning and teaching older adults and to theoretical perspectives of adult intellectual and cognitive development. As a result, teaching practices, program design, course content, and materials may be developed to more appropriately fit the developmental needs of older adult learners.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe how older adults experience learning while taking degree programs at university. Specific questions were:

1. What teaching practices do older adult learners think help them to learn best?
2. What teaching practices do older adult learners think impede their learning?
3. How have older adults' perceptions of what helps them learn changed as they have aged?

Rationale

Identifying what teaching practices are most effective for older adult learners is particularly important at this time. The world population and the labour force are aging (Johnston, 1991). By the year 2031 almost 25% of Canadians will be 65 years and over whereas in 1996 the figure was approximately 14% (Glossup, 1996). As the number of older adults grows in the population, increasing numbers of them may seek educational opportunities at the college or university level, in community educational programs, or in the workplace. In response to downward economic trends of the last 10 to 15 years,

business, industry, health and social services are restructuring their services and operations. This restructuring entails retraining and cross-skilling employees, many of whom may be older adults. For those who have retired, greater longevity and better health status provide opportunities for interest and leisure education. However, with increasing age the risk of health problems escalates. With the current emphasis in health care on health promotion and outpatient treatment, people will be required to take more responsibility for their health care, and consequently, will need to be more knowledgeable about their health. Thus, older adults may seek more opportunities for health education. Therefore, whether for job retraining or cross-skilling, interest and leisure education, or health education, increasing numbers of older adults may be found in educational programs throughout all segments of the educational system. Consequently, it is increasingly important for adult educators to use teaching practices that will enhance their learning.

Implications of the Study

The results of this research may be very significant for both researchers and educators of older adults. The theoretical framework offers us a new way of thinking about learning in older adulthood. It extends adult learning theory by adding the perspective of intellectual and cognitive growth. Rather than focusing on presumed cognitive deficits of older adults, we can view them as dynamic individuals seeking learning opportunities for personal development. As a result new paths may emerge for both research and teaching. For researchers, the method used in the study offers an

alternative to the usual quantitative approach used to study teaching methods and older adult learning. It adds the older adult learners' perspective on the efficacy of particular teaching practices to the existing literature. For adult educators, the findings suggest the need for changes in teaching practice and provide ideas on changes that may be made. As the baby boomer generation ages, there is a potential for increasing numbers of older adults to seek educational opportunities. It is important that we are prepared to meet their learning needs.

Definition of Terms

Cognitive Aging: A decrease in performance on various measures of cognitive functioning associated with increasing age in the adult portion of the life span (Salthouse, 1991).

Content Analysis: The process of identifying, coding, and categorizing primary patterns in the data, through analysis of the content of interviews, to search for patterns and themes across cases (Patton, 1990).

Crystallized intelligence: An ability to understand relationships or solve problems that depend on knowledge acquired as a result of schooling and other life experiences. Tests of general information, word comprehension, and numerical abilities are all measures of crystallized intelligence (Shaffer, 1985).

Fluid Intelligence: The ability to solve abstract relational problems of the sort that are not taught and are relatively free of cultural influences. The kinds of problems that are used to measure fluid intelligence include verbal analogies, memory for lists of unrelated

items, and tests of one's ability to recognize relationships among abstract figures (Shaffer, 1985).

Instructional or Teaching Practices: Those behaviours employed by teachers to help learners achieve their intellectual goals. These practices include but are not necessarily limited to teaching methods, techniques, instructional materials (Harrell, 1987).

Learning: The process of using prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action (Mezirow, 1991).

Life Review: The recollecting of earlier times and the restructuring of life stories (Wolf, 1984).

Reflection: A cognitive skill with which adults explore their thoughts and feelings about both their past and present experiences to come to new understandings of these experiences (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985a).

Reminiscence: The recollection of earlier times and the restructuring of life stories (Wolf, 1984).

Self-directed learning: An interactive set of knowledge, attitudes, values and behaviours of the individual in pursuit of purposeful self learning experiences within any environmental context (Kasworm, 1992).

Working memory: A limited capacity system consisting of representation codes for the temporary storage of information and a central executive capable of attention, selection, and manipulation of information (Baddely, 1986).

Wisdom: An expert knowledge system in the fundamental pragmatics of life

life (Baltes, 1993).

Assumptions

I want to be clear about my assumptions on what I believe about learning in older adulthood and what I consider to be good education. These assumptions are based on my own experiences of returning to university as a mature student, my studies of cognitive aging and adult education, my experiences as an adult educator, and my life experiences in general, where I have learned about the important contributions that many older adults have made to society. I believe that healthy older adults do not suffer deficits in cognitive processes such that they have difficulties in learning. From my perspective, any problems they may face are much more likely to be related to factors such as physical health, emotional state, motivation, previous educational experiences, or length of time they have been away from school. Such factors may affect any adult's ability to succeed in learning.

I have assumptions on what a good education means. I believe that a good education is one in which learners are active participants in the educational experience where they have many opportunities for group discussion and asking questions. From my earliest days in university, I have questioned the value of three-hour lectures. The best part of lectures was the opportunity they gave me to meet other students and share experiences. I have been very aware of my assumptions throughout the research process. The measures that I took to ensure my impartiality are reported in the methods section of this thesis.

Overview of the Remainder of the Document

The remainder of the study is reported in the following chapters. Chapter Two reviews the literature as it relates to adult intellectual and cognitive development, studies of teaching practices used with older adult learners, and older adult's learning experiences. Chapter Three describes the method used, including research design, sample selection, and procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter Four introduces the participants to the reader through their case studies. Chapter Five identifies and interprets common themes across cases, relating them to the literature and the theoretical perspective used to interpret the findings. Finally, Chapter Six offers conclusions, implications for theory development, further research, and teaching practice.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Models of Cognitive and Intellectual Development

Older adult learners are thought to differ from young adult learners in intellectual and cognitive development such that they require different teaching practices to facilitate their learning. Until recently, there were two models of adult cognitive and intellectual development, a stability model and a decrement model. A third model is emerging from contemporary research, a model of intellectual and cognitive development that emphasizes growth based on the experience of dealing with the concrete problems of real life (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). This review gives a brief explanation of each model and outlines its implications for research and the education of older adults. Next I discuss contributions on adult intellectual and cognitive development from the adult education literature and perspectives on adult cognition. Lastly, I review research on older adults' learning experiences. I propose that viewing adult intellectual and cognitive development as growth provides a broader, more positive perspective for research on the education and training of older adults. Such research may lead to more appropriate and effective teaching practices for older adults.

The Decrement Model

The decrement model of adult intellectual and cognitive development suggests that as adults age there is a gradual decrease in their ability to process, recall, and use information as a result of the biological deterioration of the central nervous system (Salthouse, 1991; Tennant & Pogson, 1995; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986). For the

(Salthouse, 1991; Tennant & Pogson, 1995; Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986). For the most part, research on teaching strategies for use with older adults has been based on this idea. Consequently, such research has focused on how presumed cognitive deficits may be diminished or reversed. For instance, associated strategies include the use of advance organizers for organizing information (Hamaker, 1986; Wilhite, 1983), explicit instructions in how to process to-be-remembered material (Ratner, Padgett & Bushey, 1988; Rissenberg & Glanzer, 1986), training in the abilities of inductive reasoning and spatial orientation (Schaie, 1994; Schaie & Willis, 1986; Willis, 1990; Willis & Schaie, 1986), training in imagery techniques to remember familiar sayings (Wood & Pratt, 1987), names and faces (Yesavage, 1989), and self-pacing (Hulicka, Sterns & Grossman, 1967; Treat & Reese, 1976). Such strategies have helped older adults to improve their performance on subsequent tests. Although this research does show that older adults' learning can be enhanced, it tells us little about what strategies older adults prefer to use or what the most effective teaching strategies may be.

Research studies demonstrating cognitive deficits with aging have been criticized. Typically, they have been cross-sectional studies within an experimental paradigm where learning is measured by recall tests. Although most researchers understand the difference between learning and memory, in studies on learning, learning and memory are often confused (Arenberg, 1994). Recall tests are more aptly tests of memory, and do not necessarily reflect what was learned. Some critics attribute poor performance to motivational factors such as anxiety, cautiousness, fear, or disinterest that may influence findings (Whitbourne & Weinstock, 1986). Others argue that the research methodology

more suitably taps the abilities of young rather than older adults (Labouvie-Vief, 1990). Labouvie-Vief (1990) asserted that research methods fail to recognize that older adults may exhibit a mode of cognitive functioning qualitatively different from that of young adults. Recall tests measure only the acquisition of new information. They do not measure higher level cognitive skills that adults use to solve every day real-life problems. Consequently, they are not a particularly appropriate measure of the cognitive abilities of older adults.

Cross-sectional studies comparing the performance of older adults to that of younger and/or middle-aged adults have been criticized also because they fail to take into account individual differences which become more pronounced with advancing age or the variety of confounding factors, such as social and historical factors (Bolton, 1990), cohort differences (Perlmutter, 1983), environmental conditions, poor health and lifestyles (Thornton, 1986) that may influence findings. All learning is context bound. Learners bring to the learning situation their personal histories, their unique personalities, their particular motivations, hopes, and concerns. These factors influence their learning. The validity of research findings is suspect when such factors are not taken into account.

In an attempt to make research findings more ecologically valid, some researchers have studied how older adults solve real-life problems. In a review of the literature, Willis (1996) cited several studies where older adults were more efficient than younger adults in their problem-solving approach. Even though she recognized that older adults increasingly used “prior experiential knowledge and well-honed procedural strategies to solve problems of daily living” (p. 304), Willis attributed older adults’ successes to a “coping

strategy based on their increased need to conserve physical and emotional resources” (p. 304). Willis leaned heavily on the decrement model to explain these research findings even though rich experience in solving life’s problems might have been a simpler explanation.

A further criticism relates to the operational definition of cognition. In cognitive aging research, cognition is narrowly defined as those abilities measured by psychometric tests of intelligence (Salthouse, 1991). Tennant and Pogson (1995) asserted that the intelligence test tradition has a number of shortcomings that may lead to the devaluation of distinctly adult forms of intelligence. Intelligence tests do not take cultural or age differences into account. They are constructed from problems and tasks derived from the context of schooling rather than everyday life (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Intelligence tests fail to measure precisely those aspects of cognition such as wisdom, sagacity, judgement, insight, effective application of ones’s capacities, social cognition, and long range planning (Salthouse, 1991) that adults develop as they mature through the experience of solving everyday problems. Similarly, Sinnott (1994) asserted that intelligence test tasks are specifically designed to work with simpler thinking. When they are used to analyze mature thinking, they may capture only part of the complex thought processes of mature adults. Consequently, when cognitive abilities are appraised using conventional intelligence test measures, it is not surprising that older adults perform more poorly than do younger adults.

The above criticisms are supported from a philosophical perspective. It has been argued that cognitive psychologists, while studying human behaviour, have presupposed that mental events can be inferred by empirical research that selects aspects of human

behaviour for controlled observation, measurement and prediction. It has been argued that empirical research designed to discover mental events has no truth value. Kockelmans (1990) called into question the possibility of an empirical science of the person, stating that it is difficult to develop operational definitions for such things as a person's intentions, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings so that they are observable and measurable. He noted that an empirical science of the person was not impossible but that such a science has meaning within relatively narrow limits. Consequently, there is a need for other approaches to the study of human behaviour. Kockelmans asserted that human behaviour could not be understood adequately if it was not understood within the context of a person's past and the history and tradition of the society to which that person belongs. He suggested that scientists use a "scientific and intersubjectively verifiable discourse," (p. 86) in which they could verify the acceptability of a person's statements made within the discourse by examining the acceptability and adequacy of the statements on the basis of the actual and humanly possible experiences that they themselves have had or could have. Thus, from this philosophical perspective, it is not enough to conduct experimental studies to learn about the cognitive abilities of older adults. Research must include an exploration of their abilities within their personal, social, and historical contexts through dialogue, understanding, dialectic and interpretation.

Perceiving adult cognitive and intellectual development as a process of decline related to the slowing down of the central nervous system has led to research focused on identifying strategies that might diminish or reverse presumed cognitive deficits. Although findings have demonstrated that older adults can learn from specific teaching strategies,

the methodology has been criticized from several perspectives. Educators are left with little information on what teaching practices might be most efficacious for older adults' learning.

The Stability Model

The stability model of adult intellectual and cognitive development purports that cognitive ability remains essentially the same after maturity (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). This idea is based mainly on the findings of longitudinal research studies. In the Schaie Longitudinal Study, Schaie and his colleagues assessed the mental abilities (verbal meaning, space, reasoning, number, and word fluency) of more than 5000 adults for 35 years during six major testing cycles (Schaie, 1994). Over the years, Schaie attempted to control for problems associated with measures of intelligence such as age, cohort (year of birth), and time-of-measurement effects (the year the tests were administered). They discovered that there was no uniform pattern of age-related changes in adulthood across all intellectual abilities. There was at least modest gain for all abilities from young adulthood to early middle age. Verbal meaning, space, and reasoning abilities did not begin to decline until the mid-sixties. However, there was a reliable age decrement found for all abilities at age 67. Nevertheless, this decrement is modest until the 80s are reached (Schaie, 1994). Perceiving adult intellectual and cognitive development as essentially stable suggests that older adults do not need to be taught differently than younger adults. Consequently, this viewpoint does not single out older adults as a focus for research in adult education.

Adult education has been premised on the stability model of intellectual and cognitive development, and consequently, the literature in adult education has essentially ignored the older adult. Tennant and Pogson (1995) have suggested that the idea of measuring and grading intellectual capacity does not fit well with the egalitarian ethos of adult education. They stated that adult educators are more comfortable with the concepts of cognitive or learning styles which describe learners as different rather than superior or inferior on some quantitative scale. Adult education has emphasized the identification of personal, intellectual, and affective characteristics of learners as a basis for developing learner-focused teaching practices (Cranton, 1989). Even though this approach is learner-focused, it is not clear to what extent the learning needs of older adults will be recognized or met when the underlying assumption of cognitive development is that of stability after maturity.

Regarding intellectual and cognitive development as a stable attribute after maturity has not led specifically to a consideration of the learning needs or cognitive abilities of older adult learners. Even though adult education emphasizes the identification of individual learner characteristics as a focus for choosing appropriate teaching methods, thinking of adult cognitive abilities as a stable attribute does not recognize the important connections between life experience, aging and learning that affect educational experiences. Adult educators who base their teaching practices on the stability model of intellectual and cognitive development are not likely to understand the learning needs of older adults in their classrooms.

The Growth Model

The growth model of adult intellectual and cognitive development contends that growth centres on the accumulation of experience in dealing with concrete problems at work, in the home, and in community life (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Tennant and Pogson (1995) stated that mature adult cognition is characterized by the ability to fit abstract thinking into the concrete limitations of everyday life. Unlike problems on intelligence tests, real-life problems are often poorly defined, may have several right answers, and contain limited, ambiguous or contradictory information. Resolving such problems requires new forms of thinking and reasoning beyond those required to solve abstract problems found on intelligence tests. Thus, experience is seen as the locus for adult intellectual and cognitive development.

Baltes (1993) provided a theoretical perspective for thinking of cognitive and intellectual development as growth. He has described two types of cognitive functioning: the cognitive mechanics and the cognitive pragmatics. Baltes' (1993) ideas have evolved from the earlier work of Cattell (1963) and Horn (1970) who differentiated between fluid and crystallized intelligence. The cognitive mechanics (comparable to fluid intelligence) are primarily determined by the evolution-based neurophysiological structure of the mind, while the cognitive pragmatics (comparable to crystallized intelligence) primarily reflect the impact of culture. He stated that in the cognitive mechanics there is aging loss, whereas in the cognitive pragmatics there is evidence for stability and positive change for persons who reach old age without specific brain pathology, and who live in favourable life circumstances (Baltes, 1993). From his perspective, the power of knowledge and

culture enriches and compensates for the decline in the neurophysiological structure of the brain. He suggested that with the principles of culture and cultural evolution it is possible to have a larger vision of cognitive aging that "outwits" the biological limitations of old age. Thus, the pragmatics of intelligence become the focus for intellectual growth in adulthood.

The idea of the pragmatics of intelligence as the focus for adult intellectual growth has led to research on practical intelligence, wisdom, and the development of expertise (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Baltes' (1993) studies on wisdom are particularly informative. In one study, young and old human service professionals and distinguished older citizens identified as being wise through a nomination process were compared on a variety of wisdom-related tasks. Participants were asked how they would resolve two complex life situations. The findings showed that the performance of older adults compared very favourably with that of young adults. When older adults were resolving these problems, they were more apt to consider the context of the situations and the importance and salience of an individual's values in making life decisions. Baltes pointed out that results of studies on wisdom that tap the pragmatics of intelligence differ substantially from those of studies in which cognitive abilities are defined in terms of conventional measures of intelligence. Older adults performed well when asked to resolve complex problems that were based on life experiences.

Understanding intellectual and cognitive development as growth suggests that older adults may need to be taught differently than younger adults based on their developmental trends resulting from their accumulated life experiences. This

developmental perspective broadens the possibilities for conducting research on instructional practices to improve older adult learning. Rather than attempting only to diminish or reverse presumed cognitive deficits, researchers may turn their attention to considering how to enhance older adults' learning by emphasizing their strengths. In order to do this, researchers must hear from older adults about their experiences in educational settings. Adult educators, aware that adults' cognitive abilities may differ depending on their life experiences, may develop instructional practices suited to their learners' developmental trends, thereby meeting their learning needs more appropriately. Adult educators can pay more attention to the important connection between the ideas of life experience, aging, and learning. Cognizant of developmental trends in adult cognition, they may explore the nature and extent of older adults' experiences, and thereby meet their learning needs by designing developmentally appropriate learner-focused instructional practices.

Contributions from adult education

Even though the adult education literature has essentially ignored the older adult, the work of some theorists, although not directly addressing the issue, does have implications for a model of intellectual and cognitive development as growth. Mezirow (1991) referred briefly to cognitive function and aging as "greater awareness of the social context or dimensions of a problem, greater focus on an analysis of premises, greater awareness of psychological factors and individual and social goals in analyzing task situations, and greater integration of logic and feelings" (p. 159). However, he carried the

theme no further. Nevertheless, Mezirow's theory of transformative learning can be considered as an intellectual and cognitive model of growth. Tennant and Pogson (1995) were the first to discuss the relationship between intellectual and cognitive development and aging. They have linked the idea of intellectual and cognitive growth based on the accumulation of life experiences to lifelong learning and adult education. They identified three key concerns in adult education and discussed them within a developmental perspective. These concerns are: acknowledging the experience of learners, establishing an adult teacher-learner relationship, and promoting autonomy and self-direction. These issues have special significance when teaching older adults.

The significance of past experiences in adult learning has long been recognized (Brookfield, 1987; Brundage & Mackeracher, 1980; Dewey, 1963; Knowles, 1978). However, the important connection between the notions of life experiences, aging, and learning has not been addressed in the adult education literature. Bolton (1990) asserted that the differences between older and younger adults were based mainly on their experiences. Older adult learners will have had very different experiences based on the social, historical and economic times in which they grew up. These experiences need to be recognized and taken into account when older adults enter the classroom.

Based on the nature of older adults' life experiences, the teacher-learner relationships adult educators form with older adult learners may be very different than those formed with younger adults. Tennant and Pogson (1995) asserted that because teachers and learners are adult peers, there is a widely held view that the teacher-learner relationship should be participative and democratic, characterized by openness, mutual

respect, and equality. They declared that there are political, social and psychological dimensions to education that create tensions in the teacher-learner relationship, and that adult educators need to have a very clear perception of their role in order to resolve issues of dominance, dependency, and control. Further complexity is added to these issues when teaching older adults. Older adults may have very different expectations of the teacher based on their previous experiences in school. Older adults may have very different needs, wants, and motivations related to their current phase in life. Factors such as these will affect the relationship that adult educators establish with older adult learners. In order to develop an appropriate relationship adult educators must understand older adult learners from their perspective.

The final issue for adult education raised by Tennant and Pogson (1995) is that of promoting autonomy and self-direction. It is not clear to what extent older adults are self-directed in their learning. While attending school in their formative years, older adults may have experienced authority-focused teaching methods that do not promote self-directed learning. Consequently, they may expect a teacher-centred learning environment. Conversely, as a result of their particular life experiences, older adults may have very clear learning goals and well-focused plans on how to meet them. Jones (1993) found a positive relationship between self-directed learning and age for art students in university settings whereas in community settings she found a positive relationship between self-directed learning and educational level. She suggested that self-confidence in learning abilities attained through educational experiences may be the underlying factor in self-directed learning. Tennant and Pogson (1995) asserted that self-directed learning is domain

specific, that it is impossible to be self-directed in a particular area if one does not have a good grasp of the content in that area. Perhaps older art students in university may have possessed more knowledge about the subject than those studying in community settings, and consequently were more self directed. Kasworm (1992) asserted that older university students operate as self-directed learners within the formal system regardless of their instructor's strategies. Possibly because older students are more likely to be independent with work, family, and social responsibilities, they take more personal responsibility for their learning activities. Clearly the idea of self-directed learning is complex. It is important not to make assumptions about how self-directed older adult learners are. Adult educators must learn about the educational experiences of older adults to assess how autonomous they are in their learning and how to promote self-direction appropriately.

Perspectives on Adult Cognition

Adult cognition has been described in various ways. Regardless of the perspective, all view cognition as a developmental process. One of the important aspects of cognition is reflection. Results of the reflective process may be a new perspective of the experience, a change in behaviour, or a commitment to action (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985b; Boyd & Fales, 1983; Brookfield, 1990b; Kitchener & King, 1990). Although Boud et al. (1985b), Boyd and Fales (1983), Brookfield (1990b), and Kitchener and King (1990) have described the process of reflection somewhat differently, all believe that it is essential to learning from experience and for personal growth.

Mezirow (1985, 1991) took a different perspective on reflection. He differentiated

between reflection, critical reflection, and critical self-reflection. Only the latter involved exploring one's own belief system and frame of reference. He outlined the use of reflection when he differentiated between three types of learning: instrumental, communicative and transformative. Instrumental learning is a task-oriented, problem-solving, hypothetical-deductive approach to learning which may employ reflection. Communicative learning is learning to understand the meaning of what others communicate concerning values, beliefs and feelings through an interpretive and explanatory (hermeneutic) approach involving critical reflection. Transformative learning involves identifying and challenging one's worldview through critical self-reflection, which results in a new, more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative understanding of one's experiences. Mezirow (1985, 1991) inferred that transformative learning through critical self-reflection is a more mature type of cognitive ability. In her description of transformative learning theory, Cranton (1994) stated that an adult's psychological and cognitive development is marked by an increased ability to validate prior learning through reflection and to act on the insights obtained.

Critical thinking appears to resemble critical reflection. Both Garrison (1991) and Brookfield (1987) have described models of critical thinking. Garrison (1991) viewed critical thinking as a broad construct encompassing both problem solving and creative thinking. He considered critical thinking as cyclical in nature consisting of five phases: problem identification, problem definition, exploration, applicability, and integration. Brookfield (1987) described critical thinking somewhat differently. He stated that critical thinking consists of identifying and challenging assumptions, recognizing the importance of understanding the context within which assumptions and consequent actions are

formed, exploring and imagining alternatives to current ways of thinking and living, and developing reflective skepticism so that things are not taken for granted. Both models have been related to transformative learning. However, Cranton (1994) considered Brookfield's perspectives on critical thinking much more aligned to transformative learning than Garrison's.

Underlying both critical thinking and transformative learning may be a form of thinking described by Kramer and Tang Bacelar (1994). They depicted a feature of wisdom, which some older adults are thought to possess, that they called dialectical thinking. They identified two modes of adult thinking: relativistic and dialectic thinking. Adult thinking develops toward relativistic thinking and then dialectic thinking. They described relativistic thinking as follows:

Relativistic thinking rests on the assumptions of change, subjectivity, and novelty. All knowledge is seen as influenced by its context, and contexts are continually changing. As one's standpoint, or context, changes, sometimes arbitrarily or randomly, prediction is seen as impossible, as all people and events are unique and continually changing in potentially unsystematic ways. Consequently, irreconcilable contradiction is a central feature of understanding. There is no necessary order to a relativistic universe; any order is imposed externally or via one's cognitive framework. Relativism ... is limited in that it does not provide a mechanism for integrating across contexts and time frames to provide for meaningful commitments to values, growth, and the like (p. 37).

Kramer and Tang Bacelar asserted that continuing to think in a relativistic manner may lead to fragmentation, inaction, and anomie. They argued that knowledge continues to reorganize to yield a form of thinking called dialectical. They described dialectical thinking as follows:

Dialectical thinking sees all knowledge and reality as engaged in continual movement and characterized by inherent contradictions. To this extent it incorporates relativity. However there is forward movement (i.e. growth) and the contradictions are seen as inherently interrelated - part of the same whole, rather than simply shifts in perspective - and more apparent than real.... In a dialectical system all elements are interrelated and are reflections of an underlying unity (p. 37).

Kramer and Tang Bacelar asserted that many people probably do not reach the dialectical level. They added that, since it develops as a result of adaptation to particular real life demands, no one would be expected to demonstrate it across all domains or even consistently within domains or situations. Also, they emphasized that these modes of thinking do not develop apart from emotion.

Moody (1986), looking for a deeper understanding of what it means to learn from experience, described the role of analogy in learning. He defined analogical learning as the capacity of human intelligence to recognize similarities and differences among infinitely varied categories of experience. Moody stated that learning from experience requires complex cognitive strategies for analogical reasoning, based on heuristic principles of problem solving, to cope with different fields of information. He declared that those older

people judged wise are those who respond to genuinely novel situations by applying the lessons of experience in an entirely new context.

In summary, mature cognition has been described in terms of critical reflection, critical thinking, dialectical thinking, and analogical thinking. In each description, learning from experience is perceived as the locus for cognitive growth. These perspectives support a model of adult intellectual development as growth. Growth in this sphere results from the accumulation of experience in dealing with life's problems.

Exploring Older Adults' Learning Experiences

The learning needs and experiences of older adults have been studied from the perspective of personal and social development. Several studies have looked at older adults' reasons for seeking learning opportunities. Wolf (1983, 1985a, 1990) interviewed older adults from 60 to 80 years of age enrolled in a variety of educational programs. She found that older adults returned to school for such reasons as concerns for cognitive decrement, dreams of fulfilment, and a need to contribute and be productive. She interpreted her findings in relation to life phase theories such as Erikson's and gerontological theory and research. In Erikson's theory, the developmental task of the last phase of life is to integrate one's past experiences with the present in the light of normal physical deterioration. Successful resolution leads to a sense of integrity and wisdom, failure leads to despair (Goleman, 1988). Later, Wolf (1991) crystallized her findings into three themes: learning and meaning making, learning and the shadow self, and learning and cognitive reordering. In learning and making meaning, older adults are trying to find

meaning in their own life experiences and often study philosophy, history, and literature as they reflect on their own personal development. In learning and the shadow self, older adults are learning in order to move into new roles and experimenting with parts of their personalities that were quiescent in earlier life. In learning and cognitive reordering, older adults, recognizing that the myths of aging are not valid, have a wish to experiment and explore through a reflective process of self discovery. Wolf interpreted these themes through lifespan and personality theories of development. All three themes are related to personal fulfilment.

Adair and Mowseian (1993) reported similar findings as a result of studying the role of learning during transition to retirement. However, they found practical reasons for pursuing learning as well. Adair and Mowseian discovered that participants engaged in two types of learning activities: learning related to basic survival needs such as health, finances, and social support and learning related to personal fulfilment. The former demonstrates practical reasons for learning. The latter is related to satisfying needs and goals related to themes of identity, affiliation, competence, and involvement in purposeful and useful activities. These latter themes resemble Wolf's findings.

Scala (1996) found gender differences in older adults' reasons for learning. She surveyed students over 60 years of age attending college. She reported that the most frequently cited reasons for returning to school were related to enrichment or love of learning. However, women were more likely to go to college for love of learning while men went for job training or to get a degree. Scala attributed this finding to participant's roles in life. She reasoned that men, the traditional wage earners, were most probably

interested in learning because of their employment status, whereas women, who were more likely than men not to have continued on to post-secondary education, were fulfilling long unfulfilled desires of obtaining an education. Johnson (1989) found, in structured interviews with 19 college students over 60 years of age, that most individuals returned to school for reasons related to job and career advancement. These older adults were intending to seek employment after graduation. Perhaps the recession of the 1980's has shaped these participants' motives and goals for attending college. It is interesting to note that, in both these studies, participants were over 60 years of age and possessed motives for learning related to job training and career advancement rather than preparing for changing roles related to retirement.

Two studies described participants' perceptions of classroom experiences. Johnson (1989) asked students over 60 years of age about their learning experiences while taking college courses. Older adults described the learning experience as revitalizing and as contributing to making new beginnings. Their classroom experiences were positive, fun, and enlightening. Older adults were active participants in the classroom. They were highly verbal, didn't hesitate to question or answer or give opinions or advice. Johnson found that these older students were not critical of their instructors. They described instructors as outstanding, caring, and knowledgeable. Nor did older adults criticize the quality of instruction or curriculum. The instruction was excellent and course curriculum adequate and well paced. It is interesting that these 19 older students had nothing negative to say about their experiences. Perhaps the method of data collection, structured interviews consisting of 17 questions, may have led participants to answer in what they thought were

appropriate ways.

Cleave-Hogg (1996) reported different results in students' perceptions of their professors. She investigated how older people (over 30 years of age) who were enrolled as full-time students in undergraduate university programs perceived their learning experiences. Cleave-Hogg found that participants resented when they were expected to accept an absolute perspective, a singular solution to a problem, or the professor's posture as absolute "Authority." She reported that participants felt they had to accept the situation, make the most out of the learning experience, and keep their own goals in view in order to survive. Cleave-Hogg interpreted her findings within Perry's (1970) conceptual framework of student development. With the exception of three participants, all were in the final stage. Cleave-Hogg found that students in the final stage were self-directed and took responsibility for their learning. They resented not having an egalitarian teacher-student relationship as they had expected. In this study, older students were defined as over 30 years of age. Only seven out of 64 participants were over 50. The number of participants over 60 years of age was not reported. The relevancy for this study must be determined.

There are several important differences in the above two studies. Johnson (1989) interviewed 19 students over 60 years of age whereas Cleave-Hogg (1996) interviewed 64 participants 30 to 65 years of age. Johnson (1989) used structured interviews whereas Cleave-Hogg (1996) used in-depth interviews. Johnson (1989) interviewed college students whereas Cleave-Hogg (1996) interviewed university students. One or more variables related to age, number of participants, type of interview, or the setting may

explain the conflicting results.

General recommendations for teaching practice were made in the above studies. Wolf (1985b) recommended the use of reminiscence as an effective learning strategy for older adults. She believed that this method would help older adults with the process of life review helping them to make meaning out of their experiences. Wolf (1985b) suggested specific exercises such as values clarification, mapping, and collecting oral histories to promote reminiscence. These methods may work best in classes consisting of older adults only. Wolf (1991) made further recommendations for adult educators. She suggested that adult educators respond with greater understanding of the older learner by eliminating stereotypical and belittling factors from the learning environment, by achieving a greater appreciation of all human development, by exploring the processes by which learners achieve integrity and joy, and by adopting curricula and experiences which enhance the learning potential of older adults. Integral to this process is the need to establish trust with older adult learners and develop an appreciation of the life experiences older adults bring to classroom (Wolf, 1991).

Cleave-Hogg (1996) made recommendations for the university system itself. She stated that universities must desist from blaming the older student for perceived problems. Cleave-Hogg said that in education “it is the norms of the institution that are taken as acceptable and it is the nontraditional student who requires examination” (p. 247). She believed that universities must go beyond providing education for specialized training or the accumulation of factual knowledge to assuming “responsibility for fostering developmental progression of each student’s learning toward complex, conceptual forms

of knowledge” (p. 248).

Although they did not cite research, Courtenay and Truluck (1997), coming from a lifespan development perspective, suggested that educational activities for older adults be centred on helping them to make meaning of their lives by critically reflecting on the assumptions underlying their world views. As their life circumstances change, older adults must revise or adopt new perspectives to adapt to their new realities. Teaching practices such as case study, debate, drawing, questioning, or making three-dimensional objects were suggested to foster critical reflection and thinking.

The literature in educational gerontology has provided examples of teaching practices presumed to facilitate older adult learning (see Charles, 1983; Glass Jr., 1996; Hiemstra, 1992; Twitchell, Cherry & Trott, 1996). For the most part, these practices are based on the decrement model of cognitive development, and incorporate findings from experimental research which were discussed in the last section. Interestingly, none of the above writers devoted more than a sentence or two to linking new learning material to the past experiences of the learner. One exception is Bolton (1990) whose approach is more aligned with that of adult education. He suggested that methodology design should become more individualized, more a creative than a technical process, and deschooled.

What is known about how older adults learn has been derived mainly from external observation of their performance in experimental studies where the theoretical perspective is that of increasing cognitive deficits with aging. Several studies have explored older adults’ reasons for seeking learning opportunities. Two studies described older adults’ perceptions of their classroom experiences. However, the majority of participants in one

study were between 30 and 50 years of age. This information needs to be supplemented with more work that sheds light on and emphasizes older adults' own understanding of what practices help them to learn effectively. Thus, this study explored older adults' perceptions of their learning experiences.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe how older adults experience learning while taking degree courses at university. Specific questions were:

1. What teaching practices do older adult learners think help them to learn best?
2. What teaching practices do older adult learners think impede their learning?

Originally there was a third question on how older adults' perceptions of what helps them learn might have changed as they have aged. Although participants were asked this question and talked about their experiences, it did not emerge from the data as a theme, and so was dropped.

In-depth, open-ended interviews were conducted with nine participants over three occasions, one week apart. Participants were interviewed in their homes with the exception of two people who chose to be interviewed in an office in my home department. They were asked to keep a journal as a means of reflecting on their current learning experiences. A description of the design, participants, data collection and analysis is outlined in the following sections.

Description of Research Methodology

Design

This qualitative study involved in-depth, open-ended interviews with nine people taking degree courses at university. As well, they were asked to keep journals as a means of reflecting on their current learning experiences.

Selection of Participants

Adults over 60 years of age, who were actively engaged in degree programs at a large metropolitan university were selected as the population. Nine individuals selected through purposeful sampling were interviewed.

The age at which an adult was defined as “older” was chosen based on the most common age group defined as “older adult” in the research studies reviewed. While some (Adair & Mowesian, 1993; Eysenck, 1974; Salthouse, 1988) considered older adults as being over 55 years, others (Craik & Masani, 1967; Craik, Morris & Gick, 1989; Hultsch, 1971; Ratner et al., 1988; Scala, 1996; Treat & Reese, 1976; Wolf, 1983, 1985a, 1987, 1990) described them as over 60 years of age, and yet others (Schaie & Willis, 1986) over 64 years. In a review of the literature on cognitive aging, Salthouse (1991) concluded that researchers in the field of cognitive aging are fairly consistent in referring to adults from 60 to 90 years as old. Taking all of the above information into account, in this study, older adults were defined as people over 60 years of age.

Maximum variation sampling, a type of purposeful sampling described by Patton (1990), was used to choose nine participants. Patton stated that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth. In maximum variation sampling, participants are chosen based on their diversity. This method of sampling offers an opportunity to discover unique and diverse variations in how the participants experience learning, as well as to identify important common variables that cut across their variations. Such common themes are significant because they have emerged out of a divergent sample.

The first step in maximum variation sampling was to identify the criteria for choosing participants. In addition to being over 60 years of age and actively engaged in educational programs, in this study the criteria were the following: (1) self-evaluation of good health since poor health may affect one's ability to learn, (2) both men and women, (3) taking degree courses at university, (4) variety of educational courses being taken, and (5) willingness to commit a significant amount of time to reflection on and discussion of their learning experiences. These criteria provided good diversity within the sample.

Participants were found by contacting the coordinator of the Senior's Program of a large metropolitan university. I asked her to put me in touch with students fitting the above criteria. She recommended six students who were willing to consider my request. Five of them agreed to be part of the study. Three other persons were referred by colleagues and one was referred by a participant. Before inviting anyone to participate in the study, I spoke with each person by phone to determine their appropriateness.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth open-ended interviews. With the exception of two people, older adults were interviewed in their homes over three occasions, one week apart. Two participants chose to be interviewed in my home department at university. Each interview was approximately one and one-half hours long and tape recorded. I chose this process because Wolf (1983) found it very successful in her research with older adult learners. One and one-half hour interviews over a period of three weeks allowed opportunity for rapport and trust to develop. Participants were very

comfortable in sharing their stories with me. Participants were asked to keep journals to describe their current learning experiences in the classroom and reflect on their thoughts and feelings about these experiences. It was thought that keeping such a journal might help both in increasing the accuracy of their recall during interviews and in promoting reflection on their learning experiences. In the end, only three participants were comfortable keeping a journal.

Interviewing older adults.

Prospective participants were contacted initially by telephone at which time the purpose and nature of the study was explained. Specifically, I explained what I would ask in the interviews, how the information collected would be used, what their participation would entail, the voluntary nature of the study, how I intended to handle confidentiality and anonymity, and their freedom to withdraw without penalty at any time. In particular, participants were told that their names would be changed in the thesis and that the name of the university or the city in which it was located would not be used. Also, participants were informed that they would have an opportunity to review their case studies and edit parts that they thought might identify them. When they agreed to take part in the study, I arranged the dates and times for the interviews. Notebooks with instructions on how to keep the journal were mailed approximately two weeks prior to the first interview. At the first interview I repeated the above information and obtained written informed consent. (See Appendix A). Demographic data were collected during the interviews.

A general interview framework as suggested by Patton (1990) was used for data

collection. (See Appendix B for my framework). The actual wording of the questions depended on the specific context of each interview. The first interview focused on present learning experiences. Questions were asked about courses being taken currently to establish the context. Although I had intended to focus on learning experiences as a young adult and as a middle-aged adult during the second and third interviews, the first participant referred to these experiences throughout the initial interview. Consequently, I changed my strategy to allow the conversation to flow where the participant wanted to go. The second interview went into more detail about the participant's learning experiences. The third interview picked up where the second interview left off. As well, participants were asked what helped them learn best, what hindered their learning and what suggestions they might make on teaching practices to enhance their learning. As well, they commented on their goals, hopes, and fears for the future. I considered the interviews with my first participant as a pilot for the framework and made changes to my approach as noted above.

Interviews were tape recorded with the participant's permission. Notes were taken to highlight certain points for further questioning, and to facilitate later analysis. Field notes were written after the interview. The data were transcribed verbatim as soon as possible after the interview and ambiguous statements were clarified at the next interview. Probing questions were developed from the transcriptions to guide the following interview. Ambiguous statements in the final interview were clarified during the data analysis.

Reflective journals.

Participants were asked to keep journals about their thoughts and feelings concerning their current and past learning experiences. They were encouraged to reflect on the meaning and significance of their experiences. The following instructions were written in each journal.

“Please reflect on your experiences while taking courses at university, what they mean to you, and how you felt, and record some of your reflections. Do not be concerned with how much you write. Instead ensure that what you write really reflects your thoughts and feelings - what you thought about, how you felt, what connections you made, what was important to you.”

At the final interview, participants were given an envelope (with postage paid) and instructed to mail to me any further reflections that they might have.

Although participants were encouraged to use the journals as a means of reflecting on their learning experiences, only three of the nine participants elected to use them. Some participants stated that they were too busy to take time to write in their journal while others said they were uncomfortable doing so. Where journals were used, the information became the basis for the first part of the subsequent interview.

Data Analysis

Before I began the actual analysis, I explored various approaches to qualitative data analysis. I thought the most appropriate approaches were phenomenology described by Patton (1990) and heuristic inquiry described by (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic inquiry

requires the researcher to be both investigator and participant. After considerable reflection I decided that I was not comfortable including myself as a participant in the study. The phenomenological approach focuses on the question: “What is the structure and essence of experience of this phenomenon for these people?” Because this question was essentially the one I was asking in my data collection, the phenomenological approach seemed best and so I chose it.

The tasks for data analysis and interpretation in qualitative research are organising, describing, and interpreting the data (Patton, 1990). I followed Patton’s process in carrying out the analysis.

Organizing the data

To organize the data, individual files were set up for each participant. These files consisted of computer files of the transcribed interviews, journals, and my notes. Three disk copies of the data were made and stored in separate places for safe keeping. One hard copy was made as a working copy for editing purposes as I prefer to work from both computer files and hard copies.

Describing the data

Although several themes had begun to emerge during the data collection phase, I began the search for themes in earnest by listening to the tapes of the interviews several times. Then I set up the data in Folio Views, a computer program with powerful search capacities, and began the content analysis of individual cases. I coded the data and

attached notes where appropriate. Next I searched the data by code, grouped the data by code and copied it into Word Perfect. These files became the individual case records. It was at this point that primary patterns emerged. Each case record was organized in chronological and thematic order.

From the case records I developed case studies outlining the primary patterns and themes. Individual case study analysis was helpful in understanding the personal story of each participant. As well, it provided a basis for highlighting variations in learning experiences between the participants. I included my own reflections at the end of the case study. These reflections were quite useful later when I began the search for common themes across cases. As each individual case study was completed, I mailed it to the participant for their comments. Without exception, all participants agreed that I had captured what they meant to say. Often they added additional information to supplement a point. A member of my committee, acting as second reader, agreed with my findings. In this way I validated patterns and themes.

Interpreting the data

Once the individual case studies were completed and approved by the participants, the Word Perfect files were transported to Endnote which was used as a search tool for the cross-case analysis. The cross-case analysis was done to compare individual responses to various topics covered in the interview guide. Through inductive analysis four major themes were identified. In identifying these themes I looked for categories developed and articulated by the participants, Patton's (1990) indigenous concepts, and categories that I

recognized but were not labelled by the participants, Patton's (1990) sensitizing concepts. Once these themes were identified, I considered possible causes and relationships in attempt to interpret them. I returned to the adult education and cognitive aging literature and weighed different theoretical perspectives for best fit. As each theme was written, it was sent to a member of my committee for validation.

Summary

This study has used a phenomenological approach to exploring the learning experiences of nine older adults taking degree courses at university. Through content analysis of the transcribed data, individual case studies were developed. Subsequently, four major themes emerged through an inductive cross-case analysis. Individual case studies are presented in the next chapter and the themes are discussed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANTS' STORIES

The purpose of this study was to describe how older adults experience learning while taking degree courses at university. Three in-depth interviews were conducted one week apart with nine older adults, three women and six men. Participants ranged in age from 66 to 76 years. Their educational levels ranged from Grade Eight to masters degrees. Participants came from a variety of backgrounds and were taking a wide range of courses. (See Appendix C for details).

In this chapter the participants are speaking for themselves. Case studies are presented in the order in which participants were interviewed. These case studies are shorter versions of the ones used to analyze the data. At the end of each case study, I have included some of my own reflections.

The headings in each case study represent classifications under which I have grouped the data. Themes identified in the data through cross-case analysis are discussed and interpreted in the next chapter. It is my pleasure to introduce Andrew, Maureen, Ted, David, Andrea, Fred, Richard, Jessica, and Jeremiah.

Andrew

Andrew is a 73 year old gentleman who grew up in Kingston during the Depression. He was one of six children. Andrew's parents died when he was 12 years of age and he went to live with his aunt who had a large family of her own. It was the depression and, upon his aunt's advice, he enrolled in the commercial stream in high school. Upon graduation Andrew went to work as a clerk in the Canadian Officers'

Training Corps of a university. He said, “There was certainly no time or money to think about a post-secondary education in those days. Universities were for the elite. That certainly did not include us.” When work at the university ended after the training season, Andrew began to work in the shipyards. He said, “The pay in the shipyards was quite a bit higher than it was in university. In spite of the future that may have been offered to me at a university job, I went with the money as anybody who was 16 years of age might.” World War II had begun and so when Andrew turned 19 in 1943 he joined the army.

Work History

Andrew served on active duty in Italy and Northwest Europe. When the war ended he opted to stay in the Army and make it his career. Part of his decision was based on the fact that if he had taken the option to pick up his education as a veteran, he would have had to return to high school to obtain the prerequisites for university. Andrew said, “In the meantime Joan and I got married.... I got commissioned in 1951 as a second lieutenant, probably the oldest second lieutenant on the planet. Second lieutenants didn’t walk around with two rows of service ribbons, but I did.” Promotion in the army was tied to professional advancement training and so Andrew took a series of educational programs. Studying was on “your own time, your job came first.” Andrew said:

We took it as a necessary evil, that these were hurdles that we would have to achieve if we were going to get promoted. So we did our studying under objection. We really weren’t into it from the same attitude that I have towards studying now where I am looking forward to it.

Andrew spent 30 years in the army and retired with the rank of major at 49 years of age. After retirement he went to work for the government as a tax auditor. Andrew retired from the government at 65 years of age.

Why University Now

When Andrew retired he decided to go to university “more or less as a hobby.” He said:

I decided to pick up on the post secondary education because I didn’t need all these high school credits as a senior.... Another thing too was to find out if I had the intelligence to absorb university level education.

Starting University

Starting university was quite bewildering, overwhelming, and foreign. Andrew said:

I was in a sea of teenaged kids doing their first year studies. Every once in awhile there would be another senior standing there looking as bewildered as I wondering what am I doing here.... Here you are in one of the major learning institutions of North America with 35,000 students thrashing around and you’re swept away by being impressed with the place. The professors are intimidating because they got lists of degrees after their names that long.

There is a counsellor for seniors who helped Andrew to ease his way into his studies. She helps eliminate all the “red tape” associated with the admission process and course

registration. Andrew said, “She is an absolute gem who takes interest in each senior student.”

Choosing Courses

Andrew spent a lot of time in Italy during World War II and “got an affinity for the country and the people.” He returned to Italy in the late 1950’s as part of the United Nations peace keeping force in the Sinai. As Move and Control Officer, he administered the transportation of material and personnel to and from the Sinai. During this tour of duty he learned to speak some Italian. Consequently, he chose to study Italian as his first course. Italian was much harder than Andrew had thought it would be. He did very poorly on his first test. Andrew said:

The poor old professor was appalled, no more appalled than I was.... I recall quite clearly coming out of there very depressed. Maybe post-secondary education was a lot tougher than I thought it was. Actually the truth of the matter was that Italian was a lot tougher than I thought it was.

Andrew’s keen interest in history, especially war history, has provided the direction for the remainder of his courses. He has not taken any courses outside of History because he is reluctant to leave this topic. Andrew said:

I have been sort of dodging that one. I know that I have to do it eventually.... I will gather up all the opinion that I can find around the school and then go to the course catalogue and see what they have to offer.... One of the happy things about it is that if ... you don’t like it you can always drop it. But I don’t like to approach

anything from that point of view. I like to think that I have considered the thing well enough that once I make my commitment I am going to see it through to the end.

Andrew denied that there might be some trepidation on his part when considering courses outside of History. He said, "I'm so comfortable in History. And maybe I just sort of regret leaving History for something else even for a year.... What do I have to fear really? It's not going to affect a career or anything like that." Andrew has taken six credits in History. His courses have focused mainly on the history of World Wars I and II. Currently, he is studying Contemporary Europe, "the origins of World War I up until pretty much the present time."

Attending Classes

Andrew has taken several courses in which many students were enrolled. The classes were in large amphitheatres where the professors lectured. Andrew finds lectures particularly onerous. He said, "Sometimes you get back to back lectures. Sometimes the professor says, 'Well, we are running behind. So we won't take the ten minute break.' He carries right on. You get 120 minutes of information packed into your skull."

In contrast, although the professor lectured when Andrew took Italian, the classes were much more participatory. He said:

You had to get up and do your translations and pronunciations. He didn't just stand up there and talk to us. He involved us. In some cases, he had us divided into groups where we put little skits on ... in Italian. That was fun. I enjoyed it.

Andrew has no opportunity to ask questions during his current course. He said:

The professor usually has so much information to pass along that he goes overtime. The only indicator that he has to stop is the shuffling and rattling of notebooks and the little sideboard that you put your notebook on squeaks when you turn it back up to its rest position. And all the squeaking takes place throughout the auditorium and he says, "I guess it is time to stop." It's like on the farm the cows know it is time to go to the gate to go back to the barn for milking. Well the students know when it is time to end the lecture and get out of there. The professor would be happy to go on probably indefinitely.

Tutorials provide an opportunity to ask questions. During the tutorial the teaching assistant poses questions and asks students their opinion. Andrew said:

As the tutorial goes on, he will say to one of the students, 'You be quiet. You have spoken enough. I haven't heard from this person over here yet. Now what do you have to say about this?' And the person, 'Um-a, um-a.' So he does bring out everybody. And he waited until we knew each other well enough that he knew that people would be less embarrassed or not embarrassed by being literally forced to speak.

Andrew doesn't think that this approach is "too bad if it is done well." He said:

If you are just going to make a deliberate attempt to focus on somebody, especially if they are very young, very sensitive, it might discourage them and they may not even want to come to tutorials. But the way he does it, it is a gentle prod.

Andrew comes to tutorials well prepared and ready to answer the TA's questions. He

said:

I have never been too bashful about speaking up. I got to the point where I was answering questions and the TA was telling me to not answer them for awhile to give the more reluctant kids a chance to say something. The only thing was that nobody wanted to say anything.

Andrew took the rebuke in the sense that he thought was intended. He said, "I certainly wasn't resentful. I didn't feel that I was being scolded or anything like that." Since then, Andrew has changed his approach "a little bit." He said:

When he asked a question, there would be this sort of a long pregnant pause, indicating that nobody was going to jump up and volunteer the answer. If I had the answer I would raise my hand slightly.... He would ask me then. I think it was not so much a case of the younger students not being prepared as the fact that a lot of them were maybe a little bit bashful about blurting out something that may not have been right. I sort of grew out of that a long time ago.

Views of Professors

Andrew has found professors extremely helpful and is most impressed by "their very high standards." He said:

These people have not only studied the material they teach, but they have probably researched and studied far beyond that, even to the point of travelling abroad to look at primary source material, and look at the actual area where the studies originated, to get the broadest base of information on it they can.

Andrew believes that students need to learn what professors expect from them so that they can tailor their responses in essays and on exams. In one tutorial, Andrew offered his personal opinions on the subject matter and subsequently was asked to stick to the references. He said, "There is no point in trying to buck the system and this is what they want. And this is what you should give them, so, pretty good reason."

Memorable Classroom Experiences

Andrew had one upsetting experience in a History course that he has never forgotten. The holocaust was being discussed. Andrew said:

I asked him a question, and he reacted very strangely, a combination of hurt, resentment, and I thought, "What have I said to upset the man?" And he, being Jewish himself, was reacting to this question as if it were almost personal.... He sorted me out pretty good in front of the class and told me that my question wasn't the least bit helpful. Now I was bewildered, and I wondered why, because I had read his book and in the dust jacket of the book was the question itself.... So, anyway, that sort of all died down and I don't think that he's resented my question to the point where he became biased about my grades.... I wondered, should I have an interview with him personally and ask him what it was about ... I thought later it might just further exacerbate the problem and I thought, "To hell with it, leave it."

Andrew felt very self-conscious about the professor's reaction. He said:

I was the only senior in the class, and I was the focal point of the whole group.... I thought that, well, my face must be about the colour of Little Red Riding Hood's

cloak right now. And I thought, “Oh well, I’ll live through this.” It didn’t have a lasting effect. I don’t let these things burden me. If that was the worst that was going to happen, I wasn’t going to feel too badly about it.

After this episode Andrew was much more cautious in class. He said:

I was careful to steer away from anything that might be deeply controversial from that point. I didn’t want to get him on another hobby horse about whatever it was he was upset about. Maybe I should have really followed it up. Maybe it came across to him that I was being insensitive to a very serious problem.

In another incident, Andrew’s war experiences were not acknowledged. Because Andrew saw active duty during World War II, he believed that his war experiences were quite relevant in History classes where World War II was the focus. Andrew felt that he had a lot to contribute and was taken aback when his ideas and experiences were rejected in a paper that he wrote. He said:

I had made a statement that one of the legacies that was left behind from the war in North Africa was the proliferation of land mines across the desert. These things may be buried or the desert winds may blow the sand away and expose them. Nevertheless they’re there in the hundreds of thousands, maybe millions. And in Libya there are probably over a million nomadic people whose life since time immemorial consisted of wandering that desert, and now they wander it at their peril because they’re being blown up by these mines. And there doesn’t seem to be any answer to the problem, or way of putting a stop to it.... But I mentioned it in the term paper, and then, I thought that I had brought up a cogent point. But I

didn't get any marks for it because it wasn't part of the reference material, just something that I had thrown in extemporaneously. The instructor said 'That's all well and good but we wanted you to stick to the reference material and I don't think that was covered.' But I kind of wondered about that because, on the other hand, we are taught to think, and we are taught to throw in things that cross our mind that are relevant. And to me that was relevant. It wasn't what he was looking for.

Andrew thought that it was "not a big deal, and felt only "mildly resentful" and "didn't press the point."

Past Experiences and Current Learning

Andrew discovered that history courses gave him a broader perspective on World War II. They have helped him understand the global picture and have given new meaning to some of his own war experiences. Andrew said, "All these major events started to filter through to me, the reason why I went to Italy, why I went to Northwest Europe after Italy, why we didn't go from Italy through the Balkans as was suggested."

Study Habits and Learning Strategies

Andrew has improved his study habits since he started university. He said, "When you first started to study it was difficult to establish priorities and to sort out in your mind what mattered." In reading history texts he has learned how to identify the purpose and pick out the main points. Then Andrew writes a synopsis as a way of learning. Andrew

said:

Lectures and note taking are an on and off thing. You may have caught a point and you may have missed a point, but with your own personal studies and your own personal note taking from your studies, you have not only the responsibility but the best opportunity to capture all the information.

In studying for history exams Andrew “reviews the notes from the lectures and tutorials, refers back to the texts for confirmation of major items, maybe memorizes a few dates, only to the point of keeping events in chronological order.”

Andrew believes that the real purpose in studying History is to learn the lessons of history so that they are not repeated, not simply to learn about past events. He said, “I think we find that in every level of experience, we have a chance to change and to avoid pitfalls. If you haven’t learned from the errors of history you are bound to repeat them.”

Andrew contrasted studying History and Italian. He said:

I studied for Italian purely by memory work.... It is just a case of building ... on your vocabulary and then studying the structure of the language so that you can make up sentences and put them together. That differed entirely from the study of History. History is a subject where you think your way through the experience ... not only what happened, but why it happened, what is the lesson, and how do we apply it to the future.

Views on Examinations

Andrew does not mind exams. He said:

If you study for them they are not nearly as bad as they may otherwise be. When you have to sit there and create something that you hope will be what they are looking for and you're not sure of the reference material you are in trouble.

Andrew considers writing exams a challenge and a way of finding out what his abilities are. He said, "If I am doing this I may as well do it properly and find out for myself if I really might have become the university level student."

Self-Evaluation

Andrew has learned that he can do well academically. His grades are improving and are in the B, B+, and A- range now. He said, "The question was always in my mind because I had never taken academic subjects to any extent in secondary school. That raised the question about whether I would ... be able to handle post-secondary education. I'm satisfied now that I can do that."

How Andrew Learns Best

Andrew believes that everything he does "falls in to place as a total learning experience." He learns best through private reading. Andrew said:

Private reading is probably going to be the part of your course that is going to make the difference in a good grade or ... a mediocre grade. The school can only take you so far. The rest of the way you have to make on your own.

What Impedes Andrew's Learning

Andrew believes he learns very little from lectures. He said:

I am trying to try to capture the highlight of what the professor is saying. And I'm not a fast writer. So by the time I get down the point that he has just made, he's into the next point and my mind is trying to get up to speed to understand the next point and the next point and the next point. So I find by the end of the lecture I am physically drained.

Andrew finds that large classes held in auditoriums do not provide "the most comfortable learning conditions." He said:

The air gets a little bit stale, and after an hour you have to force yourself to focus on the instruction.... You start thinking about the discomfort in the classroom, and you have these silly little foldout arms on the chairs that you set your notebook on and write your notes, and sometimes they're not working too well.

Classroom conditions are exacerbated by some professors who have distracting habits such as "talking to the blackboard, tapping his pointer against his trouser leg, addressing the group with his hands in his pockets shuffling change."

How to Enhance Andrew's Learning

Andrew believes that lectures could be a better learning experience if professors were to "take about twice the time to cover the material or half the material in the same length of time, so there would be a chance for someone to get down the information and to ask a question as they go along." He suggested that professors direct students to

research the topic on their own. They could say, “Now you people have some reading to do. Go catch up on what I didn’t talk about. From there on it’s your ball, your court.”

Relationship with Younger Students

Andrew enjoys his relationships with younger students and views their acceptance of him as a highlight of going to university. He said:

When I first started I wondered how I would be accepted as a senior, whether I would be looked upon as something out of the dark ages and everybody would move three rows away and leave me sitting there all by myself. And I was very happy to find out that that was not the case.... I found that on every course that I took that within a couple of weeks the younger people would come around and they would be sitting down beside you and saying things like, ‘What topic are you going to write on for your essay?’ Or they’d ask you general questions, ‘How would you approach this?’... I thought that that was great, and it happened every year in every course.”

When young students come to Andrew with questions, he feels quite responsible in providing them with good answers and advice. He stated “They seem to have confidence ... in what I tell them.... I don’t like to just give them an offhand comment. I like to be sure that I have thought the answer through pretty well.” In one very significant incident for Andrew, students in a fourth year seminar course asked Andrew if he were having a problem with time. He said:

We had to turn in a draft of a large essay so that we could ... read each other’s

drafts and make recommendations on how they could be improved. And the students ... were complaining that the professor was crowding them too much as far as time was concerned. Hopefully to be of help, I said, "When you guys become chief executive officers or senior managers or directors you are always going to be chasing time. You're going to have deadlines to meet and decisions to make. And there is not going to be any latitude at all. And by what you're doing now, you are preparing yourself to meet that eventuality. That's why people become leaders in their professions. They have learned to get over these obstacles." By this time half of the class is listening to me. The professor is pretending to be looking up something in his text and quite seriously taking it in too. But he didn't comment, but some of them said, "Yeah." Others grumbled, and some others outright thought it was a crock and I just left it at that.... One thing that I could fortify my argument with was that I knew a lot more about being 20 than they knew about being 72.

Benefits of Going to University

Andrew believes that university studies have enabled him to converse more broadly on a wider range of topics and has improved his intellect. He said:

I have a friend who is a professional engineer. He is interested in what I am studying and asks me a lot of questions about it.... So I find that perhaps without my studies, I would have missed out on some very enjoyable exchanges with my friends.

Purpose of University

Andrew views going to university as a challenge, a way of testing his abilities. He said:

“Well, a friend of mine has told me that...he didn’t see university as giving him all of that knowledge which he could apply to a job so much as the ability to take any challenge and to attack it and overcome it. I think that is really the point of going to school unless you’re taking a purely professional or technical course like Engineering, Chemistry, or something like that.

Another purpose of university is “to make students to learn how to think.”

Andrew said:

Where I didn’t get this training ... at a post-secondary level when I was younger, I did get it in my military training. As officers we were taught to think in an orderly, empirical, sequential basis. We learned to go right to the narrowest focus of the problem to find out what must be resolved. And you keep your focus ... and gradually work toward the solution of the problem.

Goals and Future Plans

Andrew’s goal is to obtain a degree with a major in History. Soon he will be finished his history requirements and will need to make decisions about breadth courses. Andrew is considering English, a “not too technical” science course, Political Science or Psychology. He said:

One of the happy options that I have is dropping a course and taking another one.

I haven't had to do that. It's nice to know the option's there. And I suppose it will probably be a little more important as I branch out from History to breadth topics.

When asked by his counsellor what he expected to be when he graduated, Andrew laughed and said, "Hopefully not more than 80."

My Reflections

There is a tension between Andrew's belief that the purpose of university is "to learn how to think" and his belief that he must feedback to professors in exams and papers what they expect. Although he wondered about having to "stick to the references" in one essay and resented being told to do so, he does not question this to any great extent. At the same time Andrew is creating his own learning through developing a "global picture" of World War II that has helped him to make meaning out of his own experiences.

Grades are quite important to Andrew. They demonstrate that he has the intellectual capacity to succeed at university. Although he says that he is not afraid of taking breadth courses, I believe that he is. He is worried that he will not do well in such courses proving that he cannot make the grade after all.

Andrew respects professors highly for their expert knowledge and is reticent to criticize their teaching methods no matter how poor they may be. Professors' credentials intimidate him. His experiences in the army may have conditioned him to perceive them as higher ranking officers who are not to be questioned or criticized. This may explain why he falls in readily with the idea that he must feed back to professors what they expect.

Andrew likes to be the centre of attention in the class. He enjoys the experience of

having younger students come to him with questions and for advice. He has had a few experiences where he has been the focus of negative attention. Although Andrew indicated that these situations didn't bother him, he was very self-conscious at these times and I think that they bothered him more than he cared to admit.

Andrew makes a clear distinction between education as preparation for work and education as acquisition of general knowledge. I believe he perceives that a formal education consists only of the latter. Andrew did not talk about professional advancement training as formal education. It was a "necessary evil" for promotion in the army. On the other hand, attending university other than for the professions is formal education directed towards the development of skills required to meet the challenges of life.

Maureen

Maureen is a 70 year old woman who grew up in Western Canada in a family with six brothers. Her ancestors were of Mennonite background who immigrated to Canada from The Netherlands. In her family, educating girls was not the cultural norm. Maureen's formal education ended with Grade 8. She said, "When you're that young, you obey your parents, and you don't ask why, why the boys and why not me?... You didn't go against your parents wishes ... you obeyed. That was the bottom line." Maureen talked her father into sending her to business college for one year. She said, "My parents weren't that well to do, and it was wartime, around the end.... I learned typing and shorthand and bookkeeping, which is what I did then all my life. He thought that was a waste too." After graduating from business college Maureen moved to Ottawa to work for the government

“along with all the other thousands of women that were there at the time.” There Maureen met her first husband. When they became engaged they moved to British Columbia to be close to his family. Maureen said:

I’ve had a long life.... But always at the back of my mind, always was a thought that someday, someday, I’m going to get my turn. And then you have a family, and then you remarry and then you have another family, and the years go on, and you have to work.

Over the years Maureen worked mostly in hospitals as a medical stenographer. She had dreamed about being a nurse but “if you can’t have what you want, you do the best you can.” Maureen retired at 67 years of age and moved east to be close to her son. She said, “I needed a change in my life because my husband had passed away in 1986, and I felt that was long enough to be in that house.... And I felt my son needed me.... I am so happy to be here.”

Starting University

Maureen had mixed feelings when she started university. She said:

I felt I didn’t know anything. I’ve had ... the life experiences and business experience, but that all seemed to be insignificant compared to this. This is quite overwhelming. It’s quite intimidating really.... It’s a different world altogether. It’s a challenge and it’s quite invigorating to be there. It’s quite an honour to be there. You feel so lucky to be there, very fortunate to go, but it’s very scary. I can remember going in the room and just almost shaking, I was so scared.

Choosing Courses

The first course Maureen took was Anthropology. She ended up auditing this course because she had a lot of visitors that fall and wasn't able to keep up with her course work. Maureen said, "I panicked and I didn't want to fail. That's not in my vocabulary. And so I decided to audit.... I found that was very good for me, to get into it."

Currently Maureen is attending summer classes in Cultural Anthropology and English Literature. She has found that taking one and one-half credits in the summer is too heavy a workload. Maureen is spending the major part of every day in class, and much of her time after class in doing assignments and studying. Maureen admits that she took on too much. She said:

I learned my lesson.... I'm going to take just half a credit from now on in the summer. I'll plug away at it and I'll get there.... Then you can at least give all your time to that one thing and do a good job and not have this business of being up all night to try to get this done."

Although Maureen wants to take courses that interest her, she is concerned about the teaching, and has decided to choose courses based on the reputation of the professor.

Maureen said:

I'm going to wait for the anti-calendar to come out at the end of June.... Although I do have an idea of who I want through word of mouth. But he's only on for half a year and then the other (half is) TBA and that's a risky thing.

Maureen must also take into consideration the timing of courses and tutorials because she takes the bus to university. She said:

It takes me an hour and a half each way.... I would rather be there earlier in the morning and come home at a decent time because ... if I miss the bus, I have to sit there an hour and wait. I can read but sometimes you're tired and you can't really absorb much.

Maureen has a speech impediment, and because of this, takes into consideration how much oral work there might be in a course. She said, "I would not take courses that had more oral work. I am very particular which ones I take. I don't want to take anything, say English, where there ... may be recitation."

Attending Classes

Maureen has hearing difficulties that affect how much she gets out of classes. She uses a tape recorder placed at the front of the class to tape professors' lectures. However, this strategy is less than satisfactory as often professors roam the room and their voices are not picked up well. Maureen said, "He lectures ... but he wanders around. Sometimes I miss things because he's at the back of the room and I'm at the front." Her professors have been asked to use microphones but often they have refused to do so. Maureen said:

It would be so much easier. A lot of people don't like microphones apparently....

But he does make it interesting if he'd just stand still. When he's behind me I don't know what he's saying. I don't know. I miss a lot.... Why does he do that?

Someone asked him to use a microphone. "No," he says, "I never use a microphone." He won't allow you to tape either.

Maureen picks up copies of other students' notes from the student services centre.

However, it is a long trek to the centre and often the notes are not ready. Maureen was very impressed by a teaching assistant in her history class of last year who offered to copy his notes for her. She said, "I almost fell over. They don't usually do that.... So he used to go all the way down to the student services centre. Now that's quite a ways.... What a nice young man."

Although Maureen takes notes in shorthand, she finds that she misses things in the lecture. She said, "While the professor puts the overhead on, you're trying to write all that, and it's one after another.... All the time you're writing what's on the overhead, they're talking. You can't do both. You either do one or the other."

When Maureen gets home she types her notes while listening to her tapes. She comments, "It's actually very helpful because... I have yet to have a lecturer that speaks slowly. They all seem to go at one pace, one speed, fast, and even then you miss a lot." One drawback that Maureen notes is that she has not learned how to discern the important points in a lecture. She said, "I take things down and when I read it over, well I'm not going to put this in, I just ignore that." Maureen will be glad when she has mastered this skill because it will save her a lot of time when reviewing her notes

Maureen is reluctant to say anything in class. This is due partly to the fact that she finds it strange to be in class with a lot of younger people. Maureen said, "Sometimes they act so silly, and I didn't like it at first. But then ... I'm part of the team too, if I have something to say, I'm going to say it." Also, Maureen's speech difficulties limit her participation. She said, "I do pick and choose my words ... but it comes out not the way you would like it to come out so it gives the wrong impression."

Maureen is very reticent to ask questions in class. She feels that she should know things that she doesn't know in order to do so. Maureen said, "I don't want to make a fool of myself, so I'm not that self-assured yet." She wrote in her journal:

I sense that I am expected to ask intelligent questions and since I feel that I don't know enough about the subject to offer an opinion or query a point that is being made (as much as I would like to speak up at times) I just like to listen to the rest.

Maureen has been in tutorials where she has asked the teaching assistant to clarify something. She said:

The TA says, "Now is that clear?" And the odd time I've said, "No, it really isn't. Could you go over that again?" And the eyes roll you know, some of the kids, the eyes roll in order to say, "Oh brother, she'll never get it." And I don't think they all do either only they don't want to lose face. And I don't care whether I lose face or not.

Maureen thinks that young people have more right to ask questions because "they have to get on with their education" although she realizes that "isn't the right way to look at it either." She does ask the professor questions "but only when she has him or her by themselves," never in front of others.

Maureen finds some classes much too long. In English Literature she fell asleep and decided to leave. She said, "I walked out yesterday ... we hadn't had a break in over two hours. I had been up since four o'clock, that's not his fault, but we need a break before the three hours are up. Those chairs are so uncomfortable." In spite of all these difficulties, Maureen enjoys lectures "especially if the professor has a sense of humour."

Views on Professors

Maureen is very uncomfortable approaching professors to talk with them. She said, “You can speak more openly to a TA than you can a professor.” However, when Maureen has talked with professors, she has found them quite helpful and kind. She prefers to speak with teaching assistants during a tutorial, “someone more on our level ... or someone that is easier to talk to.” Nevertheless, Maureen has resolved to ask more questions of professors next year because, as she said, “I am going to be entering my second year and I need all the help I can get.”

Maureen likes professors who speak clearly and make the course interesting. About one professor who did not speak clearly, she said, “Well he was the pits.... He spoke, he might have been saying, “Hi diddle diddle,” because ... even on the tape, it was all a mumble jumble. So I didn’t get very much out of his lectures.”

Maureen believes that the key to success on tests and writing papers is to feed back what the professor wants. She said, “Every professor has his or her own way of doing things, and they want you to write the way they want you to write.” Maureen wonders if professors read students’ papers. She can’t see the purpose of writing what the professor wants if they don’t read the papers or exams. She said:

Our (professor) in History, the day after the exam, he went to spend the summer in Italy. So I don't think he looked at any of our exams. So that was done by the TA.... So I just wondered why this is so when you read that you always write ... what the professor wants ... something that would show him that you have been listening to him.

Views on Tests and Exams

Maureen finds tests and exams helpful in evaluating her learning. However, she questions the usefulness of asking questions about irrelevant information. She said, "We have to know the authors, the title and sometimes even the publisher. I mean, who cares about the publisher but this is part of the learning process, and it doesn't hurt us."

Maureen criticized one professor who included information taught the previous day on a test. Maureen commented, "She's going so fast.... Well, her evaluation said ... there was an overload of information and that you could only absorb so much."

Maureen has arthritis in her hands and this affects her performance on exams. Her exams have been essay type questions. On one exam her hand cramped so badly that she was unable to write legibly and thus lost marks. Maureen said:

I wrote too much on the first essay.... I went on and on and on page after page.

And by the time I got to the last essay ... my hand just wouldn't work.... I would have had a higher mark.... I didn't know that I could say anything to my professor or the TA.... I didn't want to make any waves. I didn't want to make a fuss.... I'm sure it was hard to read, but my hand just gave up on me.

Maureen is quite concerned about how her tests are marked and doesn't think that she has been treated fairly. In a recent anthropology test, it appeared that the professor had changed the marks assigned by the TA. Maureen was certain that her answers were correct. She said, "I would have had a B. Instead I got a C. I mean that's so depressing. That's discouraging.... Any of the young people wouldn't put up with this." Maureen refuses to go to the TA or professor about her marks because it has made no difference in

the past. She said:

It's not accepted so easily when it comes from an older person as from a young person. I've seen that. You catch the vibes, as it were.... I don't want to get the name of an agitator. I did go to him once, the last time. He said, "I can't read your writing." There was just two words and, I've got arthritis and when you're working under pressure, my hand tightens up and it's hard to write. Anyway, I said, "Well what can (this) be but these two words? Well now you know what they are. They make sense. Can't you change your mark?" "No." He has his orders from the professor ... just wait until I do my evaluation.... It will be a frosted Friday before I take Anthropology again.... Well, I don't like unfairness.

When Maureen studies for a test, she reads over the textbooks and notes and, if she has time, listens to her tapes. She said:

When I write out points, events, dates, or concepts, I find that's when I remember things the best.... I don't remember things as well as I would like to, or maybe as I used to, but the more you read, the better your memory becomes.

Maureen crammed the night before a history test. She said, "I had never really had an exam before, and I just was trying different things.... Funny thing, the things that I learned that night were the things that were on the exam. Not all of them, but the important things."

Views on Writing Papers

Maureen enjoys writing papers although she has difficulty with analysis. She is

learning how to do this. Maureen said, “ I included a lot of them (author’s opinions) as quotes. But I also added what I thought, which is, you have to present an argument for or against.” Maureen has found going to the writing lab very helpful. She said:

They go over the whole thing with red ink, and you go home and do what you were asked to do.... So it’s a big help. It’s a wonderful asset.... They are both excellent.... They’re not the least patronizing, condescending. They’re so nice, and that’s really encouraging.

Memorable Experiences

In her first year, Maureen registered for an English course in which she was expected to read her essay in front of the class so that it could be critiqued. The professor refused to make any allowances for her speech impediment. She said, “I’d feel embarrassed, but I know my limitations, and I am not going to put myself into that. That would be agony.” Maureen offered an alternative where she would make copies of her essay and distribute them to classmates so that they could read it and then critique it. However the professor refused to allow her to do that. Maureen said, “Well, that’s not very understanding. Frankly I didn’t think it was awfully professional either.” Maureen refused to complain. She said, “You don’t want to get ... the name of a radical.” Maureen was quite disheartened and withdrew from the course. She said, “I can’t sit under a man like that. He’s just a young man but very unbending. He’s rigid.” Maureen was quite hurt by this professor’s behaviour. She said, “He was very condescending. He tried to make me feel as though I had some abnormality but I thought that was very poor, not too ethical on

his part.”

Another significant learning experience for Maureen has been to gain new perspectives on the role and status of women in society through her courses in History and Anthropology. She said:

When you see what they do, how they react to the different things and then you understand it.... I guess that that's what it's all about.... It sort of gives your mind a boost. It's sort of - I learnt that, and I found that out on my own and I think that is so great!.... It encourages you, and you realize that your mind is beginning to expand.

Maureen feels “it must be very hard to be put into a subordinate position, to have your work devalued.” She said, “I think of my mother. She would love to have had the opportunity to go out into the world and work and she always felt ... what she did wasn't worth anything.”

On Learning and Understanding

Maureen views university work as a challenge and is determined to do well.

She reflected on understanding in her journal. She wrote:

There are times when I am walking down the path of personal growth when I feel discouraged, not because I've lost interest, but that understanding and understanding quickly doesn't come as easy as I would wish. Perhaps this is because my reading in the past has been so selective, and now my mind is being forced to expand, which is exhilarating on the one hand but scary on the other.

Scary perhaps because I'm in competition with myself, and am a bundle of nerves, dreading tests, exams, and essays that aren't "going well."

At times Maureen feels frustrated when she doesn't see things in English Literature that the professor does. She expressed a hesitancy to write on exams things that she perceived might be considered "foolish." She said:

Like Alice in Wonderland.... He says, "Do you see that too?" And someone, "Oh yeah, sure, we saw that too." I see some things but I don't know whether ... I should write them down if I'm asked them on the exam because to me it sounds foolish, but he doesn't think whatever he says is foolish.... That's why he's there because he knows what he is talking about."

Maureen believes that her ability to understand things over the years has not changed. She said:

It's just I haven't had to think about that before. So therefore, it would be a natural thing where ... there wouldn't be a light saying, "Eureka." It's just something you have to have a grounding in, and then you understand and from there on, I believe other things become clearer also.

When Maureen went to the writing lab the professor told her that she needed to analyze more. She realizes that she needs to change her way of thinking. Maureen said:

Your thinking has to be more argumentative.... I know what he is saying.... He wouldn't tell me what to do, which is right.... But he gave me ideas, to look at things from a ... different view point.... I'm not used to doing analytical thinking. But actually we have to analyze things everyday, don't we? But it's not the same

kind. It's not under surveillance either.... It's not academic.

When Maureen begins to understand something and to think things through "it's a joy."

She said, "That's really a homely word but that's what it is. It's so great."

Self Evaluation

Taking university courses has taught Maureen a lot about herself. She said:

Well I think the most outstanding thing is that I have learnt, that I don't know enough, and I want to learn more, and I have a need to learn, almost an urge to learn more. Not that I am going to do anything wonderful with it, but I feel a wasted mind is almost a sin.

Maureen is very competitive and has always set high standards for herself. She has high hopes that things will get easier as she progresses. She said, "If you set yourself a limit, you limit yourself. And it's very true. Words of wisdom." Maureen is getting very good marks. She said:

I did very well in my essays.... I got B plus. But I just hope that I can carry on.... (I got a B) in my history exam so I have a credit.... My first credit ... I'm encouraged. I feel now maybe I have a chance.... When I realize how much education I really have ... there is such a thing as education (as) hands on experience too ... but that's not enough. I want something more.

How Maureen Learns Best

Maureen finds that she learns more from tutorials than lectures. However, she

thinks she learns most by reviewing her notes. She said:

In the lecture you take down as much as you can as fast as you can. So what you're learning from the lecture is what you learn as you read over your notes, but right then you can't absorb what's being said. Whereas in the tutorial we break things down and ... it doesn't go at such a pace. I do learn (from the tutorial) but not such a large amount as you would when you read your lecture notes over.

What Hinders Maureen's Learning

Maureen reiterated that her difficulties with hearing, taking notes, and analyzing hinder her learning. She said:

You can't turn your hearing aid up. It whistles if you turn it up too high.... But if I can get things on tape, it's not too bad.... Although that's not the only one, it's my lack of knowing how to take notes properly. I've been to workshops and ... I think this is something you learn with time.... I'm just hoping that will become easier, and how to analyze. You don't have to analyze when you read ordinary books or even when you read the text ... but you do have to analyze when you write papers.

How to Enhance Maureen's Learning

Maureen believes that being more self-disciplined and better organized would improve her learning. She said:

I find one of the hardest things is self-discipline ... I think that's something... I have to fight all my life ... to focus and to do it ... to get organized ... and don't deviate

and don't putter. You waste a lot of time just doing the puttering although it's fun.... Self-discipline doesn't come over night.

Maureen thinks her learning would be enhanced if professors spoke more slowly and didn't try to include so much in their lectures. She said, "Speak slower. And speak up. Don't mumble in your beard You see they tried to - if it's one hour, they try to cram. I think that's the big thing. Why do they do that?"

Relationship with Younger Students

Initially Maureen thought younger students resented her in class. However she discovered that they are quite friendly. She said:

There was a definite kind of a barrier and I found out later that some of them resented the fact that they thought I didn't have to pay for my education.... Then too I think some of them look upon me as a grandma ... I don't mind being looked upon as a grandmother.... And some of them say, "Oh I wish my mom would do that."

Goals, Hopes, and Fears

Maureen wants to complete a degree. She said, "It is just that I want to see if I can do it. I want to prove it to myself. Nobody else will probably even remember or care except my son and his wife." As well she wants to continue her lessons on the saxophone so that she can play in senior's residences. Maureen said, "Isn't it crazy when people have a lot to do? And I did very well until I came here. I couldn't find anybody to take lessons

from.” Maureen worries that her health might interfere with her plans. She said:

Since my operation, I’m never sure how much longer I have.... It’s always in the back of my mind, always. Not that you want to be a morbid individual, but death is never very far away, really.... I want to do as much as I can while I have the time you know.

My Reflections

Maureen is a “gutsy” lady who is surmounting various challenges in order to fulfil her dream of getting an education. I believe that she has been a victim of discrimination based on physical disabilities and age. Maureen has some inkling that she is being discriminated against, “you catch the vibes,” but she doesn’t label it or lodge a complaint.

Maureen refuses to criticize her professors’ teaching practices. She believes that she has to get used to them and feed back to them what they expect. Rather than criticize, she chooses courses carefully based on professors’ reputations. Maureen complained only when she thought she was graded unfairly. However, when the teaching assistant refused to change her marks, she complained no further. Maureen doesn’t want to make a fuss.

Maureen was willing to fight for marks because she wants to do well. She has waited all her life to get an education and so marks are very important to her. She must be successful. She is quite upset when her arthritis prevents her from completing exams as well as she knows she can. Although she knows now that she can apply for special accommodation there was no indication that she might do so.

Maureen does not expect much from professors and teaching assistants. She is

quite surprised and grateful when they help her. She was very pleased when she learned of resources such as the writing lab and student services and praises the staff.

A key learning for Maureen has been exploring how women have been treated throughout history. Although she feels she was treated differently than her brothers in how much education she was given, Maureen does not see herself as one of those whose work has been devalued. Maureen has had a successful work life and is confident in her own worth and abilities.

Ted

Ted is a 71 year old man of Japanese heritage who grew up in Vancouver where he went to school until Grade 11. He said, "It was due to the war I suppose and then we were evacuated, and our education, in a sense, stopped for about four years." Eventually Ted's family moved East. Ted reminisced about what made him start to study. He said:

Perhaps it was a priest, it's an interesting point maybe because it always sticks to my mind. And that was years ago. He had a lot of foresight, in a sense, because he told me there's two fields that you should enter because he knew I was not educated. And he told me to become an electrician or go into electronics or radio.... So when I came out this way, I started to study in that mind.

Work History

Ted worked as a service manager for a major scientific and industrial equipment manufacturer. He said:

I trained most of the technicians because ... when we started there was only what four of us. When I left I suppose there was a staff of about 30. Majority of them, I taught and more of these difficult problems, they used to send me out.... They used to call me the electron kid. I was that good at it.... Well it was just one of my talents.... I wasn't a very good manager. I always made the budget.... I didn't manage as the upper management wanted me to manage.... We had flexible hours long before they even introduced them. What's the sense of, especially if you're working in ... heavily populated city ... what's the use of fighting traffic.... Well, you know, they wanted everything worked according to how it has been done. So we changed all of this.... And then...they say, "Oh you ... should become more productive. Then I would say, "Oh I will try." So you make it miserable for everyone to come to work for that extra 5% profit or productivity, and is it going to make so much difference in the world? I guess maybe I was a philosopher already.... So I was laxydaisy, so they didn't think I was a shining manager, that's for sure. But they asked me to go to Montreal to kind of build up the place, build up our operation there. I stayed there 12 years. They asked me to come back here because this ... operation wasn't running well, I came back here and then I retired."

When Ted was transferred to Montreal he began to learn French because his position required "communicating with the public." He has continued to study French over the years. Ted said, "I've always been interested in languages. Ever since I can remember, I wanted to be able to converse in French and understand French."

Why University Now

Ted values formal education highly. He saw retirement as an opportunity to complete his formal education by going to university. Ted said, “Every possibility, every chance I had, I’ve always attended classes. Well we had to learn in a sense because with only a grade eight-eleven education I had to do something.” One of the reasons Ted cited for going to university was that he enjoys studying. Ted said:

You have to like studying. Otherwise, like all my friends they tell me I’m crazy.... But I tell them ... that everyone always wants to occupy their time one way or another. You all take trips, travel around the world in a sense if you get the money. Travel around the world, see different things, learn different things.... You travel physically. I travel intellectually.... It sounds a little bit snobbish, some kind of better than them, but I say it's in my mind that I travel. And they all agree to that.

Starting University

In the beginning, Ted went “gung ho.” Not only was he taking English at university but he was taking Conversational French at a college, ballroom dancing, and Tai Chi. Ted carried on with this schedule for about a year, then “came to his senses, came down to earth.” He said, “You have to have balance in things so that you’re not on the go all the time.”

Going to university has been a shock for Ted. He was surprised that he did not attain the same success there as he did in his work. He was considered an expert in his field, “numero uno,” “the electron kid,” and expected something similar to happen at

university. He said:

I don't want to brag about it, but I'm an accomplished person. And then, all of the sudden, you enter into ... something new and unfamiliar.... Now you are ... starting all over again. You have this feeling ... what am I doing? That's exactly the feeling I have sometimes.

When Ted started classes he realized that "there's a lot to learn out there." He said, "On these subjects like Literature, Philosophy, The Arts, I really don't know very much, and (it) kind of makes you a little bit maybe humble. This transition from work life to university life has been a "difficult psychological hurdle." Ted said:

I feel stupid among the students because ... that has been their life, some public school, high school, onto university, and they be studying all the time. And here, I've joined their kind of study stream. But I'm not even close to - somehow it's ego shattering.

Part of the psychological hurdle that Ted is confronting includes his feelings of discomfort when with younger students. He said:

I'm not very sociable, that's one of the big problems with me, and though I talk to the other students.... I always have this hang up about age. Because they're children. I'm 70.... I do enjoy their company better than the general.... But the age for me makes a lot of difference. I feel more comfortable if there's one or two older people there, so I'm not alone on this island."

Although Ted has found beginning university difficult, he feels very privileged to be able to go. He said, "I think ... any of the seniors that's going to university, they will probably

say the same thing, that they feel they're lucky, they're fortunate ... they have this inclination for learning."

Choosing Courses

Ted has taken approximately eight credits in English Literature, French, Religion, and Philosophy. Currently he is taking Ancient Philosophy. Ted wants to study Shakespeare because "you have not passed through an English course unless you have gone through Shakespeare. He is the ... epitome of literature." However, Ted is "a little bit leery about it." A friend of Ted's told him that if he were passing Philosophy, then Shakespeare would be very easy. However Ted responded, "One of the plays that we studied during the Major British Writer's course was Anthony and Cleopatra from Shakespeare, and ... I didn't understand that very much." Ted is planning on taking Epistemology and Symbolic Logic in the next semester so that he has a better understanding of the terminology and the construction of philosophical arguments. Ted said, "As soon as they start talking about logic and premises, conclusions, I get lost."

Attending Classes

There are about 30 students in Ted's Ancient Philosophy class, a mixture of young and older students. Ted likes summer classes because "there's more older students." At the beginning of each class, the professor asks if there are any questions regarding the last lecture. Then the professor gives an overview. Ted said, "There's not very many questions coming from the floor. That's for sure. Philosophy is a little bit difficult.... He keeps telling

us it's a different way of thinking." Ted thinks students ask irrelevant questions. He said:

It's a wonder that he keeps control of them because they go off on their own ideas, their own views. It isn't even slightly related to the subject matter... But you know, he's a real philosopher in a sense that his ... logic is so, why, he is like another Socrates for goodness sake. You know, he would ... question whoever it is that raised the question, he asks another question, and finally in the end, finally after four or five questions and answers, he will show that they are completely wrong, and he's very good at that.

Ted finds it frustrating when students ask "irrelevant questions." He prefers to listen to what the professor has to say since he is the expert. He said:

I only want to hear what I want to hear. That's a bad, bad thing to do, but that's how I am. So I only listen to - he is the truth. He's telling us something. He knows. And all the rest what they're squabbling about, I kind of not listen too much, too well to it. I listen to what he has to say in a sense of rebuking or refuting their views, that's good, there is method in that.

Ted's major concern is that he is having difficulty in understanding the material in English Literature and Philosophy. He has trouble finding underlying themes in English Literature and finds Philosophy very abstract. In English Literature, "I could only see what's on the surface. ... But ... I'm always going off on a tangent. I never can see the main point. I can't focus into what it's all about," Ted said. In Philosophy, "So hard, so abstract.... There's never anything ... concrete. Especially this course, Ancient Philosophy, there's so much to cover, there's so much to ask, it's impossible," Ted said.

Although he finds them both difficult, Ted sees a difference between learning English Literature and Philosophy. He said:

When you're reading a novel or narratives, your imagination helps you. I think if you use imagination in (Philosophy) you're stuck.... It's ... a lot more difficult to read Philosophy than it is English because here there's a story being built in your mind. It's flowing and it's running, and as you read it just keeps flowing.

Philosophy it isn't - you have to look for an argument and what does he mean, what is he concluding. Nothing stays in the mind.

At times not understanding the material has led to feelings of frustration, discouragement, and depression. Ted said:

It comes up periodically ... "What am I doing here?... Well, one thing for sure, if I don't like it, I could just drop it, the whole idea. I don't have to do it, really. This, it's not really necessary.... Then I have this battle in my mind. And then it all comes out. After I've gone through that it makes me feel a lot better. And then, take some of the depression away.

When Ted has difficulty understanding the course material, he likes to ask questions for clarification. However, Ted has difficulty asking questions in most classes. Some professors invite questions openly at the beginning of the lecture and answer them clearly while others seem to discourage questions and are not so clear in answering. Ted raves about one professor who makes a concerted effort to answer questions at the beginning of every class. He said:

You can raise the questions. In fact, back again to (English professor), I always

asked her, well she gave an opening, always, first part of the lecture, are there any questions regarding the last lecture.... I can't understand it so I'll bring it up. So she would straighten me out.

Except for this English professor, Ted prefers to get his questions answered by teaching assistants with whom he feels much more comfortable. He said, "They are just past their studenthood. They know exactly what is troubling us or what is difficult for us. We are talking on the same level."

Ted is not comfortable approaching professors. He thinks that "some of them live in an ivory tower." Also, Ted does not trust professors when they say they are available to meet with students. He said:

If they really are going to give you the time, they would say, "I will be available certain, certain dates, available certain, certain times, or this is my phone number, you can make an appointment." Then I will say, "Yes, there is this particular time available." But if they say, "Yes, I am available." I really don't pay too much attention to that.

Ted believes there is a "teacher-student barrier." He does not understand why this exists since both he and the professor are adults. He said, "They're not reachable ... I don't know why I have that feeling. Here I'm an adult. I'm mature. I'm not a boy.... You should be able to get quickly into a good relationship with your profs, communicate." He describes this barrier as a hierarchy and uses the parent-child relationship as an analogy. Ted believes that the role of teaching assistants is to bridge this barrier. He said, "Well then I suppose they understand that so they bring in this teaching assistant which helps

both way around.” Ted’s English professor is the one exception to the rule. He said, “She just had an extraordinary talent of bridging this gap or this barrier.... I guess some have it and some don’t.... She’s more forward. The other profs are saying we’re open, not forward. Maybe that’s the big difference.” This professor makes appointments with students at the beginning of the course to get to know them personally. Ted said:

So we had to go and see her. There was no way out, and then that kind of broke the small barrier. You sit down and talk to her. And then after that she would encourage everyone to bring their essays in. She would read it and make comments on it. See what could be done to improve it, etc.

Ted has taken several courses at community college including English and French. He seemed far more comfortable in this environment where classes were smaller and he became “closer to the teacher.” Ted felt he learned more about English at college. He said, “She ... taught me a lot ... of how to write an essay, what to look for in an essay, and what to look into the novel.... She was very helpful. Then she had a kind of a writing lab off hours.”

Views of Professors

One thing that stands out for Ted is “good professors and bad professors.” He wonders how students cope with a poor professor when they have full course loads. Ted thinks good professors are logical and clear. He cited a philosophy professor.

He always writes down (on the board) the pertinent points of a lecture, so ... then he goes down step by step. But he was good. He was so logical.... He could go

through all that and then he breaks it right down and explains it, the important parts whatever it is, the premises and the conclusion. There's no doubt about whatever he was saying.

Ted believes that professors really make him think and he enjoys that. He said, "It hones your mind. I think that's the main idea of the whole learning process. They're trying to make you think, and they use these subject matters for that purpose. I like that."

Ted does not believe that professors should refer to their personal life in the classroom and was highly critical of one who did. He said, "It's terrible, telling me about his trips and during the lecture. I mean, sure we were talking about Islam but he was talking about mosques and he was there and he was permitted to enter. I mean, I couldn't care less." Ted believes that there is always "a good teaching assistant with bad professors." About one teaching assistant, he said, "I told him in the end, I said if it weren't for him, I would have dropped the course long ago. But he just carried me through. Straightened all these things that I didn't understand or didn't hear."

Memorable Experiences

Ted had a devastating experience in an audio lab during a course. Rather than criticize the instructor in any way, he laid the blame entirely on himself. He said:

You put the ear phones, and what you can't understand or you ... can't hear, you're to announce it to the monitors ... and they talk to each other and help you out. And I suppose, one of the monitors became very, very annoyed with me because I guess I was asking too many questions, or I wasn't operating the

machine properly. Kind of disturbed me.... When he said a few things he riled me, but that's alright.

Past Experiences and Current Learning

Ted is having difficulty reconciling his beliefs, values, and past experiences with what he is learning in Philosophy and sees this as a hindrance to his learning. He said:

If I could only forget my past experiences and just take in the new, probably I'll be able to understand it a lot better. Because soon as he says something and refers to something, I reflect back to my own experience, my own life, and form an opinion. But that's not what I should be doing. I should be listening to what ... they are talking about in that sense at that period.

Even though Ted's professor challenged students to make their own judgements and seek their own truth, Ted believes that philosophy professors, for the most part, must be right in what they say. He said, "I would think, 'Oh yeah, it was 500 BC that they've been thinking about all this stuff up till now.'... So there must be some truth in what they're saying. Otherwise how could it last so long?" This dilemma does not arise when studying other subjects. Ted said:

No one is questioning your belief or your opinion of yourself, the soul, when you're studying other subjects, only in Philosophy. In fact, in other subjects, even in English, I'm the one that's looking into their soul, not them looking into mine. So I guess that makes a big difference.

Struggling to understand different perspectives other than his own has helped Ted become

more sensitive to the opinions of others. He said, "If someone were to say something, make an issue, give an opinion, now I will try to look at their point of view ... which I never did before, never."

Views on Exams

Although Ted has difficulty understanding English and Philosophy, he does not mind writing exams. He said:

As soon as I see the exam and sit and start to write or put the answers in, then everything kind of - there's no stress or strain or anything. It just goes and then once the exam is finished, good or bad, I have a kind of - get a high or a lift, and I enjoy that. It's just like somebody hitting you all the time and enjoying pain.

Ted had one bad experience with an exam where he was ready to withdraw from the course. He said:

Oh it was just terrible.... I passed anyhow.... I got a C.... It was in English, Major British Writers. I was so discouraged with what I wrote because (I) had to write an essay and I selected the wrong topic.... I couldn't finish it.... I wrote so much nonsense. You know how it is when you get desperate. You fill it in? Then when I left, I knew, oh it was terrible in my mind. It was so embarrassing the way I wrote it, so I was so discouraged.

Ted talked with the seniors' counsellor and she persuaded him to continue. Ted was glad that he did because he found that he was not the only one who had difficulty with the exam. He said:

She (the professor) says, “Well, on the Christmas exam we all get together after the exam and review the marks, and then we have a great laugh together because some of the answers are so comical.” She kind of ... lightened the whole issue. So I listened to her. I felt a lot better after this. But then after that it was all uphill. I did very well. I was happy.

Self-Evaluation

Ted has an average of C+. He said, “It’s a matter of pride.... Frankly I wish I could do better, but somehow it’s just not there.” Ted consoles himself by thinking he would get much better grades if he were studying Science, Math, Physics, or Chemistry, subjects he used throughout his work life.

Ted believes that he is improving in both English and Philosophy. He writes poetry and has revised some of his poems based on what he has learned in English. In Philosophy he is trying to “pick out” the underlying meaning. He said, “What is meaningful is ... in a sense you can’t see the trees for the forest. So take away the forest and then you’ll see the tree. And this is what is meaningful, the tree not the forest.”

Ted is interested in learning for self-improvement and sees higher grades as evidence that he is learning. He finds it difficult to understand the emphasis younger students put on competition for grades. He said, “Grades are very, very important to them, not learning, that’s not important, grades! And they’re competing against each other. I can’t understand that, but that’s how it is.”

Goals and Future Plans

Ted hopes that he can finish his degree. He said, "I don't know if I ever gonna make it but the long range plan, if I live long enough and if I'm functional." Ted believes that "it's better to give than receive" and so Ted has dreams of volunteering to teach English as a Second Language to people whose first language is Japanese or Chinese after he finishes his degree. However, Ted understands the finiteness of life and the uncertainty of the future. He said, "I don't think it'll come true.... I'll be too old, you know, the age is the one that's somewhat of a stopping factor.... But I would really like to do that." If he does not finish his degree, Ted said, "I will not be too disappointed ... because I feel I'm a really lucky person.... It sounds kinda corny to say but my cup is full. So I guess when you brim over that's when you give."

My Reflections

There is a conflict between Ted's self image and his experiences at university. He is not "numero uno" at university as he was at work. This is "ego shattering" for Ted. Ted feels uncomfortable in the environment, not only with professors, but also with students. Even though Ted has experienced success by obtaining eight credits, his accomplishments are not good enough from his perspective.

It is odd that he continues to take courses in Philosophy since he finds it so hard. I think that "formal education" to Ted means a liberal arts education, and therefore he must take Philosophy. Ted has taken science courses throughout his career, first to qualify for a job in electronics and then to keep current with industry progress. Yet, he has never

considered these courses as formal education. From my perspective, Ted may be happier and more successful studying languages and fine art. Ted is very creative. He writes poetry which is published in a local newspaper, studies French, Cantonese, and Japanese water colours at a local college.

It is interesting that Ted wishes that he could forget his beliefs and past experiences when studying Philosophy. He thinks that this would make it easier. I think when a controversial point is raised in class and Ted begins to think of his own beliefs (as he admits he does), he tunes out the professor and does not pay attention. Thus he misses the meaning of the discussion and fails to understand it. He is missing out on an opportunity to critically reflect on his beliefs, values, and life experiences in light of new knowledge. Fred may tune out because he is uncomfortable with the tension between what he believes and what the professor says. He believes that the professor "is the truth." If what the professor says is true, then how can his differing beliefs be true also?

Ted does not criticize the teaching methods of professors except for some very obvious examples. He blames any problems with learning on himself. Although he values clarity and logic in professors, he praises one English professor consistently for her personable and welcoming approach.

I am surprised that Ted does not mind exams since he is having so much difficulty learning the material. On one exam he was extremely embarrassed because of what he wrote. I wonder how much he does not write because he thinks it might be perceived as foolish and how that might affect his marks.

David

David is a 66 year old man who was born in Palestine. His parents separated when he was a baby and he and his mother moved to Czechoslovakia. His mother's background was German. She became a Zionist out of "her idealistic way of thinking." During the years before World War II, David's mother was involved in missionary and social work, and as the threat of war increased she became very active in helping Jews escape the Nazi regime. Because of her convictions David and his mother were forced to leave Europe. They returned to Palestine. When the war ended in 1945, they returned to Czechoslovakia only to leave it for Austria when the communists took over. Eventually they returned to Israel and then moved on to South America. In his early thirties David immigrated to the United States. Over the years, he married twice, went to college, and worked as an electrical engineer and a college professor. In 1982, at the age of 52, he came to Canada where he worked as a reliability engineer. The company downsized in the 1990's and David was asked to retire. After David retired he and his second wife divorced.

Because David and his mother had moved extensively he learned several different languages. He said:

I went through my elementary school in so many languages. First year I went to school in German which was my ... mother tongue, and I even learned to write the old script at that time. Second year I had to use Roman characters which was a slightly different script and the language now was Czech.... And lo and behold the third year I had to do the same thing over again in Hebrew.... By the fifth year I had to get into English which had the same script that I used in Czech, but

everything else was totally different.

Previous Education

David's formal education ended when he and his mother returned to Israel. His opportunity to go to university came after he immigrated to the United States. He said:

When I was 32, first took an Associate Degree and then went for the full Bachelor degree.... I was 42 when I graduated ... and then at a slower rate, continued for my Master's degree in Computer Science but I never wrote the thesis, so I never fully completed that.

Why University Now

David returned to university in 1995 at 65 years of age because he had an idea related to Sub-atomic Physics on which he wanted to work. He said:

I was not satisfied quite with the explanations provided in Sub-atomic and Nuclear Physics which are so different from the engineering explanations.... So I was doodling for myself an explanation that satisfied me. As I did that persistently for a number of years and kept track of it and even used it when I read an article about new developments in nuclear research that it gave me quite a powerful insight.... So it was encouraging enough for me to want to formalize this. And, of course, without mathematics it would be impossible.

Starting University

Returning to university has been difficult for David, much to his surprise. He was shocked to discover that learning Calculus didn't come as easily as it did when he was younger. He was able to pass the first quiz in Calculus because it was basic material to which he could relate. However as the course progressed, he fell further and further behind and "the whole thing ... just fizzled into nothing." David was "not so much discouraged, but seriously worried" because he "saw no way out." He has to force himself to learn and study. David described his brain as acting like a car "that instead of being driven had to be pushed." He said:

This effort ... requires a tremendous amount of determination and perseverance and trying to push my brain which on its own just ... doesn't want to move....

Getting back into studying has been painful.... I've felt the pressure ... that I had applied myself being rather extreme to force myself to be able to keep up with the demand of doing assignments, being able to understand what is going on.... I think I have overcome some of those barriers ... little by little to be able to see what is meant to be seen out of what I am looking at while I am studying. Of course, in retrospect to earlier abilities to do similar things, I know how much easier it used to be than it is now.

Choosing Courses

David is struggling to find appropriate courses that will qualify for government funding for which he is eligible as a result of being laid off from his job. He explained:

The purpose of the degree was to satisfy the funders who wouldn't extend the funding unless I had a program. So the physics department gave me that program by calling it a minor degree in Physics.... I would not have personally paid any attention to that. I'm now trying to talk to a math professor to see what courses I should be taking.... The theory that I'm pursuing ... is not so easy for me to express in mathematical terms. Although I found that when I talk to professors now about it, they understand what I'm driving at.... They said that I may not find so much ready made material in that area to the level that I may need it and they have directed me to (another professor).... And the suspicion is that he will give me reading subjects.... And that's even harder because when I read something by myself and I don't have the daily interaction in classroom with the professor I may end up getting even more sleepy in the process and my progress may even be more slow.

David's funding is time limited. He has tried to work around the requirements by signing up for five and one-half credits in third and fourth year Physics which he knows he cannot handle. Now he must negotiate with the university and the funding agency to postpone some courses while not losing the funding. Also, David is worried that he might not find the help that he needs from professors. He said:

I don't have the broad overview of a mathematical theory and physical theory to be self-guided. And there may be a misunderstanding or lack of perception ... between the professor and me. So even what the professor may suggest may not lead me down the right path.... The professor didn't seem to have difficulty in

realizing what I wanted, but did seem to have difficulty in thinking of something that he came across that would help me in the best possible way.

Attending Classes

Currently David is auditing a first year calculus course and taking a second year calculus course for credit. He spends seven hours a day, twice a week attending lectures and tutorials. He said:

We have no break during the morning class because the professor has recommended it to be able to cover the material better.... I should really spend another five hours a day in order to keep up with the material from either one of those two courses together.... I don't quite manage to do that yet.

David finds that when professors make the subject more concrete and use examples of problem solving, he learns more. He said:

(The professor) used to pursue his teaching in a more structured way. He would set down the definitions and then the theorems and then he tried to write a proof of theorem. And then he would start with some simple problems in that area and expand it into more complex problems. But what that did is when the definitions were written the students had no idea why these definitions were made so they couldn't relate to them.... But by jumping more into the middle of doing some simple problems that don't really require the full scope of definition, but that are meaningful and can be understood, and then from there, going in both directions ... the formalization ... and then into more complex problems at the same time, the

student has much greater insight as to what is going on. And it seems also that the professor ... has more time available to go into more complex problem solving techniques which are very beneficial.... And most students seems to dare to do it ... to ask him well how did you get to this from that.

David was concerned that one professor tried to cover too much material. He said:

The professor ... was really writing on the board from the first minute he started to the last minute we were supposed to leave the classroom, and all we're doing is taking notes at a high rate of speed. He was talking while he was doing this and he was explaining things but it's not always possible to try to read his writing, try to write from dictation, make sure the notes are correct, and then listen to an explanation of why he is doing it all at the same time. So a lot of it went by the wayside.

David does not think that teaching assistants have the experience needed to answer questions in Calculus and this interferes with his learning. He said:

The TA ... is struggling himself. When he gets a question floored, he usually says, "We'll have to think about it and bring in the next period." His ability to do his work ... doesn't show as if it is from tremendous amount of experience and ability. It seems like it comes from his meticulous approach and perseverance in working problems that enables him to do the problems. But he can't really do and answer some things on an impromptu basis.

David likes to be an active participant in class. However, he is having difficulty in understanding the material. This has kept him from participating as much as he would like.

He said:

I tend to be an outspoken person and I tend ... to want to participate actively in whatever is going on, so I actually have to curb myself a little bit.... I like to be involved but I have found it totally impossible in the past because I was nowhere near the state of comprehension to be ... an active participant. I am able to now be increasingly so.

Learning Strategies and Study Habits

David is very concerned about his ability to learn and remember the material. He believes that his cognitive abilities are not even in “the 10, 20 percentile range” as compared to when he was younger. David’s intuitive abilities help him solve problems rather than any knowledge he has. He prefers a “hands-on” approach to learning. He explained:

Those formulae don’t come to mind as fast as they should.... Since memorizing for me is at this time almost an impossible thing, I do find it possible to recollect some of them by extensive usage in problem solving but because my problem solving work is also much slower than average, I can’t solve as many problems. So I can’t get as much training as I should that would help me to remember more things to begin with.

When David cannot remember the material, he feels like “wanting to quit 99% of the time and wanting to go on 1% of the time ... but the 1% somehow prevailed.” David was so worried about his cognitive abilities that he went to a psychiatrist at the university.

The psychiatrist told him that he was not learning handicapped. David said, "He did identify some conditions for me that affected my ability to study ... things I had to look after with regards to my retirement, and new status in life ... and also lack of proper sleep ... and things like that." Because David is "worried about aging" and what is happening to his mind, he tries to remember phone numbers and appointments without writing them down. He said, "I practise that vigorously in order to exercise my brain in that area, and I am actually able in that area to do better now than I used to before because of the effort."

The main learning strategy that David uses is making condensed notes from the text book. He believes that he has improved in this and said, "I don't need to include as many details as ... a year ago and I also know a little bit better by having gone through for the second time what is more important and what I really need to know." David emphasized the importance of practice in his learning. He said, "If I was able to take a course and come home and sit at my computer and utilize it, then it stayed on for awhile. If I didn't, I totally lost it." David believes that problem solving exercises "even though it's mental, it is still like a hands-on experience."

When David studies, he writes down as many formulae as he can remember. He said:

There is some requirement to follow the right order and sequence of it so that if I do review them it is easier for my problematic brain to retain them, and also to write down the procedures to quickly either mentally or on paper derive other formulae from the fundamental ones. So that requires quite a bit of understanding which formulae are more fundamental and which formulae have an easier inherent procedure to lead up to the more complex formulae.

David finds this studying frustrating because he is finding it difficult to make connections between concepts. It is like “putting Humpty Dumpty together.” When he cannot connect concepts, David cannot solve problems. So it was “vicious circle” because solving problems is an essential way of understanding concepts.

David plans his time to study carefully. He hates to rush or be pressured. David’s concentration is broken very easily. He said:

The best way for me to study ... is to have nothing planned within a day before I start studying, just ... get up in the morning, do some minimum of essential things and delve into my studies and I can go until late at night with certain required breaks of rest.

David has found it difficult to settle down to study because “this work has been so painful without actual physical pain.” He tends to procrastinate, “to find a million and one excuses for starting to do it later rather than sooner.” David said, “As I am getting a little bit more encouragement and that process is not as bad anymore, I can settle down into starting to do the work ... with less excuses.”

Self-Evaluation

David believes that his performance on tests is improving. On his last test he “was able to attack every problem.” However, he “couldn’t review so many of them or make too many changes.” He said:

I just had to go through nonstop and if I went in a bad direction I had to live with that and continue with it because I didn’t expect that I would have enough time to

back track too much.... For the first time I have some real confidence in what I've tried to do.

David's grades are slowly improving. He said, "I am starting way down from the bottom, between 50% and 60%. I'm not at the bottom of the class. I'm sort of maybe between the first and second third lower end ... but I do expect to get better." David believes that his memory is improving as well. He said, "My recollection of things from the past has become keener. My ability to remember people's names and to remember phone numbers have become better."

David's frustration with learning is exacerbated by the fact that he found learning so much easier as a middle-aged adult. He found that "mid-forties were sort of a time when things changed in the mind, even while one is still studying." When David started college in his 30's his "mind didn't seem to need so much jogging." He said, "I needed to just get into the experience but my mind seemed to be right there with me without any problem." This experience gave him "too much courage" when he returned to university this time. He said, "I got immediately ... burnt royally with the experience. So I had to back track very quickly and readapt to my new situation in most severe way and double and quadruple on my determination to persevere." David's determination is evident when he wrote in his journal, "I have to study the material as if it were the last thing my life depended upon, in order to retain just a little bit."

Although David must work very hard at university and has found this stressful and frustrating at times, he does believe that his "mind is improving" and this is "tremendous" for him. He said:

I think it gives me a much better feeling of contentment.... I'm finding that by virtue of going to the university my repertoire of interests is growing and ... even though I am trying not to be distracted from my studies, my ability of having more varied simultaneous interests seems to be improving.... So I find that very enjoyable and very satisfying.

What Impedes David's Learning

David believes that his learning is impeded when professors make errors when writing notes on the blackboard or skip steps in solving problems. He said:

The professor ... puts them (notes) down on the board at a very high rate of speed.... There are a few things that show up in error. Some students pick up on it including myself lately.... But the second year calculus professor he tends to get bored and he may just put the solution on and skip too many steps. Not enough students have the audacity to ask a question about that, even though I believe they would also require a lot of thinking at home to work it out.... I either wouldn't do it so correctly or miss a good point or have tremendous waste of time. I now ask the professor to do it and actually strange enough, it comes out that when he skips a line he ends up filling the whole blackboard to fill the gap.

How to Enhance David's Learning

David suggested that it would be better for teaching assistants to provide theory and have the professors concentrate on problem solving. He said:

A professor knows how to solve the problem and point out the short cuts and the tricks a lot better than the tutors. Although in the first year calculus last year, it was left to the tutor to provide those tricks and, to me, the student was shortchanged. It should be the other way around. It's easy for a tutor to present the theory without making mistakes but in solving a problem to point out the tricks and the short cuts, the tutor wouldn't have that experience as much as a professor.

David believes that he can improve his learning by practising problem solving. He said, "(As) I am putting more of these under my belt and ... I can solve these problems faster, more correctly."

David finds that if he audits a course before taking it as a credit, he is able to do better in it. He would like to audit each course once before taking it for credit. He said:

As a senior student and the future that I'm faced with, of taking even more advanced math courses and getting deeper and deeper into physics and stuff, my feeling is if I could audit a course two or three times before I have to take it (for credit), that would be wonderful. I would learn a lot more and the whole experience would be much more valuable. And since I'm retired, how soon I do it isn't so critical. It's how well I do (that) is much more meaningful.

Relationship With Younger Students

David enjoys particularly his relationships with other students. He said:

I do enter into quite interesting conversations with fellow students.... So even though there is this major age difference there always seems to be enough to talk

about with somebody during break time.... So I think it's marvellous.

Goals and Future Plans

David's hope for the future is to mathematically express his idea in Subatomic Physics. If he attains some degree of success, he thinks that he will be encouraged to continue and be funded to do so. He emphasizes that this is not the only reason why he is doing this. David said, "I've been wanting to do it. I really have." However he is realistic and said, "I'm very encouraged by this idea but it would be a mistake ... to get too carried away with the future success of it. It certainly cannot be proven until I do prove it."

David's motivation to learn is based on a belief he holds on the relationship between education, purpose and discipline. Having a purpose in life is essential for life to be "psychologically manageable." The best way to fulfill one's purpose is through learning and education, and for this, discipline is required.

David connects the ideas of faith and knowledge. He believes that both are important to avoid "wrong doing." He wrote in his journal:

Knowledge and faith are like two wings of a bird. Both must be equally developed and be sound for good flight. Religion without Science becomes stale, and Science without Religion goes out of control. Love is the foundation of all existence.

Atoms are bound together by it, and it is the force that can unify mankind. Without proper knowledge and education the spiritual capacity of mankind cannot properly express itself.

My Reflections

David is a practical rather than a theoretical learner. Consequently, he is having a difficult time understanding the abstract concepts of Calculus. He relies heavily on his past experience to solve calculus problems. He said, "I have to have had similar situations in my practice work that would enable me to be guided to try to attack such a problem." David blames his memory for his problems. In this regard he is very hard on himself. He expects to remember text verbatim and most people would find this impossible.

David is very concerned about his memory problems. I was impressed with the amount of knowledge he demonstrated on concepts of cognitive processing and memory. When I asked him if he had studied Psychology, he disclosed that his wife, whom he had recently divorced, was a psychologist and that they had talked about his memory problems often. Perhaps his concerns with his memory have been influenced by his conversations with his ex-wife.

David enjoys the interactions of the classroom and gets along well with younger students. As well, he does not like the idea of taking independent study courses. If there were an opportunity to do so, David might benefit well from participating in study groups to learn Calculus.

David is self-directed in his learning to the extent that he has a clear idea of what he wants to learn and takes steps to do so. However, he admits that he does not know enough about the topic to choose appropriate Calculus and Physics courses. He is not willing to take courses simply because they have been suggested for a minor degree in Physics.

David appears to have a good relationship with his professors. Although he does not attempt to feed information back to the professor, he does infer that the professor knows best. He said, "We have no break during the morning class because the professor has recommended it." He actively seeks professors out to ask questions and advice and does not seem to be reticent in approaching them. Perhaps this is due to his previous experiences as a university student and college instructor. At the same time, David senses a hierarchical relationship between professors and himself as evidenced when he says "most students dare to do it (ask questions)."

David has a clear idea of what he believes is good teaching. This appears in how he describes his own work as a college professor. He believes that professors should be organized in their lectures, "presenting the material" and "feeding it by very measured rates" to students. He believes that professors should give clear explanations and use language that students understand. This is evident in his description of teaching secretarial students about transistors. He said:

Graduating electronics students (were doing) their assignments ... sitting in the back (of the classroom) and here I was telling these future secretaries how a transistor worked. And I had to obviously tell it to them in a language that they could understand. And after the class was over some of these electronics students came to me and said, "This is the first time that I understood how a transistor worked."

David criticizes the teaching practices of his professors when they try to cover too much material in class and fail to explain properly all the steps in problem solving.

However, he excused the professor for his practices when he indicated that the professor was “sort of act(ing) very responsibly in a way by not depriving the students of any ramifications of the theory.” Even though he talked at length about his need to take short breaks at frequent intervals when he studies, he did not criticize the professors for eliminating breaks during their lectures in order to cover the material. He said, “If the material is interesting even at my age I forget how I feel. I just go along with it.”

Education is very important to David. However, it has become even more so now that he has retired. David sees going to university as a way of maintaining purpose and discipline in his life and keeping his mind active so that he is not a “burden to society.” He said, “I think the major contributor ... towards health is our mind and the way our mind functions.”

Andrea

Andrea is a 76 year old woman whose grandfather came to Canada at five years of age from Cornwall, England. Both Andrea’s grandfather and father were architects. As Andrea grew up she studied art. She said, “I spent more time at the art gallery in classes and in the art school there than anywhere else practically in my life.” Andrea chose to go to art college because she had an excellent chance of receiving a scholarship and it would make her education less expensive for her parents. She said, “This was in the depression... I managed to get through on a combination of bursaries and scholarships so that I never ever had to pay full tuition for the whole four years I was there.”

Previous Education

While at art college, Andrea went to sketch at a museum when it was not open to the general public . She said:

One of the big projects we had was to create books as though we were doing a medieval book, that is to write the story, illustrate it based on material at the museum, hand letter the text and bind it.... It was when the Sino-Japanese War was going on in the 30's, and I was interested to find out something about the historical relationship between the two countries. So I ... was talking to some of the curators who were ... involved in the Far East departments.

Over the years, Andrea has studied the French language. She developed a love for the language in high school and wanted to be completely bilingual. She has taken Conversational French courses, spoken French with friends whenever possible, and has travelled in France. She said:

Occasionally I take a month or six weeks off and take a summer course in France.... There's been years when I've dropped it ... because my vacations were spent in Austria hiking in the Alps where it was cheaper than in France.... So I dropped French for a bit, and I've never been able to ... bring it quite back to what it was.

Work History

Andrea worked for most of her career at a large publishing company. She said:

The Canadian subsidiary of a UK publishing house were launching a new

paperback line, reprints of popular fiction, and ... they were going to manufacture in Canada because the war was on and there were paper shortages in the UK.... So I went over there and I was interviewed and I got the job. And I retired from them after 40 years.

Andrea started out as a commercial artist and ended up as a managing editor. She said, "In the beginning I was practically a one man band. Then I got an assistant and then a secretary. Then we began to take on more editors and things were streamlined." Andrea said, "I had made this great decision to go into art instead of ... literature ... and in the end, I was reconnecting with people I had known in high school who had gone to university and there we were, all doing very much the same thing."

Why University Now

When Andrea retired she returned to painting. She said, "I always wanted to do some more work in lithography ... so I ... did some summer school ... as well as painting over at the island." Also, Andrea decided to study French ... in a pre-university program. She said, "I always wanted to be practically bilingual in French, which I had been working at ever since I went to high school. So I thought what I really needed was a grounding in grammar." For Andrea, attending university at this time of her life is "completing the circle." She said:

It was a decision when I was 17 to go to art school instead of going to the university as everybody else I knew did.... I had the time and the inclination ... and ... I had an acquaintance who had just done the same thing.... Here I was already

there improving my French and then it just occurred that to get a degree was ... kind of a neat thing to tidy this up.

Starting University

Andrea did very well in the pre-university course in French Grammar “because it was a rehash of what I pretty well knew.” She started off with a grade average of about 85. She said:

I thought I had it made, but I hadn't... Once I bit off more than I could chew, but I liked the course, so I kept on with it, and I just managed to scrape through with a pass. That was a course in French Linguistics ... and my problem was that I had to feed this information back in written French ... and my written French wasn't up to my comprehension of the language.

Choosing Courses

First Andrea decided to major in French and then changed her mind. She said, “I didn't really want to read French Literature, either the Canadian Literature in French, which I have read a lot of, or French Classical Literature, which I've read first in translation when I was young or in French.” Instead, Andrea chose to complete an honours degree with a specialist in History. She said, “I have always liked History, and I did quite well with it, and I just sort of built on it.”

Andrea has completed 13 out of the 20 credits required in an honours degree. Her particular interest is “Western European History from about 300 AD to about 1300”

because she likes “the art and architecture of that period and the manuscripts.” Currently, Andrea is taking a fine arts history course on medieval manuscripts. She said, “We will be looking at them but not assessing them as works of art but placing them in their historical context.” Andrea is having difficulty in studying art from a historical perspective. She said:

It goes against everything that ... has interested me and (I have) learnt. I've been used to making value judgments. I like this artist. I don't like that one. It's picking up on these trends and styles and actually being able to trace how they travelled across the Christian world, as an example... But it's a quite different approach and quite new to me. I'm finding difficulty with this ... because it's so compressed in a summer course. If I had taken the course in the fall term, you see, it would have been twice as long. My old brain would have had twice as long to assimilate this. So this is reflecting in my marks which I really don't like at all ... because it is dragging my grade average down. And I'm old enough to believe it's impossible for me to look at a course coldly, and say, "Alright, you only got 69 on this test. That's going to drop your grade average, junk it."

Attending Classes

About 35 students attend evening classes in Fine Art History twice a week and a tutorial once a week. The professor uses slides as a basis for teaching. Andrea has made “copious notes.” Andrea does not think it matters how big a class is “if the professor gives a good lecture, and ... his demands in the exam (are fair).” In describing the tutorial, Andrea said:

We go over what we have learnt in the previous class. So this is where the questions are asked.... The TA would pick out something from the lecture. Or we had readings that we had to do, contemporary readings. And there would be a discussion of the contemporary readings.... The tutorials I've been in have all been successful. They all have been an exchange of ideas amongst people.

Andrea particularly enjoys tutorials and prefers them to lectures. She said:

Tutorials have always been rather fun for me because I mix with the other students. We're all just students together, speaking out and speaking up.... I've never ... found ... any problem or felt any discomfort ... in being in a large or small group. I don't expect to strike up a friendship particularly with anybody there.... I guess I prefer tutorials because there is no preparation for them and I'm fairly articulate. This, of course, is where the fact that I've got a more extensive background means I can very often jump in.... They were a good learning experience too.... The TA's have been very, very good ... all kinds of different styles ... and were quite capable of ... pulling the discussion back the way they wanted it to go. So they were of great help to me in ... in altering my point of view.

Andrea believes that the professor teaching her fine arts course is "very good." She said, "She obviously enjoys what she is doing. She uses slides a lot, of course." In all the courses that Andrea has taken, she has had only one poor professor. She said, "He just tried to put too much into the lecture.... But he was a new professor ... let's hope that he's got better." The professor had allowed students to bring copies of medieval documents

used in class into the exam. However students didn't have room to place their notes on the desks. Andrea said, "When ... you're writing an exam and you got a little tablet to write on that is no bigger than a legal size sheet and other people sitting close beside you ... how can you look at documents in the time span?" Andrea excused the professor, "Well it wasn't his fault, you know, that was the way the cookie crumbled, and that was the only space which he could get for one of his exams."

Andrea finds that the main problem with taking classes is not being able "to get onto a professor's wave length." She said:

It's a question of being able to feed back to the professor on the exam what the professors wants and occasionally, and I verified this with other students, you get a class with a professor, and for some reason or other you never seem to know exactly what it is they want.... Just once in a history course I had a professor and I didn't really know what the guy was after. So I didn't do very well.... The way he phrased his questions on the tests I just found them, from my point of view, terribly woolly.

Andrea believes that professors teach what interests them and they "think you ought to be interested in" and that, on texts and in papers, students must feed back this information to them "in correct format." Andrea finds this difficult. She is interested in different aspects of history from the professor's and in writing papers she has tended to focus on her interests rather than the professor's. She said: "It's fashionable in History nowadays to downplay the politics, and much more interest is on social ... and economic history. Although I am interested in both of them, ultimately for me to get the political

history straight is ... the sort of bedrock.” Andrea prefers the history of the Early Middle Ages. She said:

I have found that I do better in History if it's back in ... what is now called the Early Middle Ages ... than I do when I took ... a course in Canadian History.

Because once again I found I've got too many opinions of my own about Canadian politics. And so ... I'm ... a bit too rigid for the kind of gymnastics of turning it inside out and looking at it this way or that way, that is required of a historian.... I think this is why it is harder for a senior to be an undergraduate.... You don't have to have much experience. Mental agility is really all that's needed at that level.

Andrea's difficulty with exploring particular issues from diverse perspectives has been most detrimental when essays were marked by young tutors “because the tutor had been perfectly trained in the gymnastic approach.” She said:

He expected it.... This has been part of the learning process for me, because ... I've had to learn what I think university expects of an undergraduate. And in a way, what they don't expect is what they get in an undergraduate who is a senior.

Purpose of University

Andrea believes that the university is “teaching you to think and to think for yourself.” She said:

(This) means to examine everything with a kind of speculative, ok, show me sort of attitude, which is harder I think to do when you are older particularly in areas where you have established opinions. Mind you, sometimes it works to your

advantage, but it can work against you because there's this conflict of someone who sees the radical point of view and expects it in the essay as opposed to the traditional point of view.... But somebody who was young would be automatically geared to go that way. I have to change gears and this is part of the relearning approach.

Memorable Experience

Andrea took a history course that changed her perspective on how she viewed the early medieval period. This was a very significant experience for her. She said:

I romanticized ... the whole early medieval period ... and they really weren't like that at all. And I think that I gradually began to learn this (in) ... European History.... It was a wonderful professor ... he simply referred to all these sort of early kings as ... gangsters. And he used the word gangsters ... over and over again to put out the fact that this is what they really were.... And this was terrific.... When we looked at the accomplishments that they were supposed to have done, well, all these things happened in spite of them you see. So it's been really sort of applying that and ... reading and seeing how spins have changed on this.

Now, Andrea analyzes leaders a lot more to “see what was good about them, what they did well, and perhaps what they didn’t do well.” She said:

I never thought of the ... economic implications which, in a way, is pretty stupid when ... my life was shaped by the Depression because it shaped my parent’s life. It influenced my growing up and ... the final gasp of the Depression was the

second world war which certainly affected my generation too. But I never took that in as a factor until later.... I was always interested in social conditions but I never thought of applying them historically ... except in very broad terms like something like the industrial revolution.

Past Experiences and Current Learning

Andrea does not believe that her life experiences have helped her present learning in any specific way. She said:

I think they help in a general kind of way to the fact that, if I hadn't had them, I'd might have got a much worse mark than I did.... But I've done a lot of travelling. I've spent a lot of time in ... France.... I know I have a lot of background information about art and culture and politics and things in France. I have done a lot of mountain walking in different places. Once you start walking in a country, you're gaining a one-on-one contact with people in a way that even if you're driving you're not. You get more of a feeling for the actual life of the country and this gives you something to draw on if you're dealing with history.

Andrea said that she thought "age has something to do with what you want to get out of a course." She said:

I'm always going to get something different out of a course because I have lived for 76 years more than somebody who's only lived for 20 because ... the course is always going to enrich me in a way because I am going to be able to relate it to a lot more things than a younger student.

Views of Exams

Andrea finds exams quite stressful but has always found them so. She said:

As I look back over everything practically in my life, I have worked under stress and I don't ... suppose ... I could eliminate it because as I look back at, your childhood, sometimes images come up and I was always sort of flying off the deep end thinking that I couldn't do something.... In the end I always managed to do it and do it fairly well. But, you know, that's a built in handicap that drags around with you.... I can't do anything about it.... I just accept it.

Andrea psyches herself up for exams. She said, "You really have to get the adrenaline pumping because you need that extra energy to work your whole body, your thinking process, and your ability to write, and write grammatically, and ... to choose a vocabulary." "I get so psyched up that I just practically ran home ... after the exam. It was a lovely evening ... but it took me all that time to sort of come down ... because I had psyched myself up," Andrea said.

Andrea thinks that age is a factor in her performance on exams.

Because I think the younger you are you have a dexterity, both physically and mentally, that you lose to a certain extent as you get older. I don't mean that it's crippling, but ... in a tight situation, it's a difference between an A mark and a B, God help me if it ever happens again, another C. Now I can get an A or an A- in an essay ... but because it's a question of research and time and one thing and another. But to take an exam where you have to really click along at a great speed, I'm not so good.

Andrea believes that having more time would make a difference although she would never ask for it. She said, "A term test is usually an hour or an hour and a half. A final exam is three hours. I do better in a final exam because I have a chance to sort of relax and unwind." Andrea strives hard to get high marks. She said:

What I wanted to do was to keep them to the level that would be basic for graduate school.... It had dropped down but I thought if I chose my courses carefully, I could bring it back up to that, not that I have any particular desire ... at this point, to do graduate work, but I just thought that was a nice sort of goal to set.

If Andrea is not doing well in a course, she refuses to drop it. She said, "If I was a young person, I would dump that class right away ... because it wouldn't be good for me. But ... I'm not given to doing that kind of thing.... If I decided to take that course, I'm going to take it." Andrea admits that she is very competitive. She said, "I'm always working very hard and dissatisfied with what I accomplish, simply because I've always been that way."

Andrea wants no special treatment as a senior going to university. She said:

I think the fact is age really has nothing to do with it. You're there presumably because you want to be there and that should be sufficient. And you've met certain requirements to get there. And I've always sort of gone into a class with that in my mind. And I've never felt uncomfortable.

Benefit of University

Although there is a tension between learning for fun and striving for high marks,

going to university means fun for Andrea. She laughed and said, “I mean it can be pretty terrible during the exams but if you add the whole thing together ... yeah, it’s fun.... But, you know, it’s got some awful moments.” Andrea counts as a benefit the “pure enjoyment of attending lectures and of finding out things that interested me but that I didn’t know about.” Andrea summed up her thoughts on going to university. She said:

It’s very simple basically.... You’re learning things that you didn’t know before or hadn’t thought about in this particular way before and you like doing this.... I’ve always been interested in learning through reading.... I think that a university education appeals to people who are book-oriented.... Basically you have to enjoy reading. Also you must be capable of being solitary.

Andrea has friends who went to university to prepare for careers and now resent that they were not able to take courses out of interest. She said, “This business of choosing courses for, not because of your interest particularly, but ... in the interest of getting a better job, goes back further than I thought.” Now Andrea realizes that this operated for her too when she chose to go to art college. Andrea understands the need for both purposes. She said, “Life is a balance of doing things that have to be done and ... doing things that interest you.... I think if you had a life only of the things that you just wanted to do but didn’t have to do, you’d get bored.”

My reflections

Andrea has led and continues to lead a very active life. She has travelled in many parts of the world. Besides attending university, she hikes with friends, takes Tai Chi and

paints. She is an accomplished artist. Her home is full of her art work, both in water colours and lithography.

Grades are very important to Andrea. Whenever she talked about a course, she made reference to her marks. Andrea is very competitive and tries hard to maintain her marks well above the grade average. She struggles with the need to enjoy what she is doing versus the inevitable anxiety and stress she feels at exam time in her quest for high marks. High marks win out. At the same time, I believe that Andrea enjoys the challenge that exams provide. She gets “a high out” of writing them.

There is a contradiction in what Andrea says about what is expected from students. She believes that she is expected to learn what interests the professor and “feed it back in correct format.” Andrea is quite pragmatic about this. On the other hand, she says that the university is “teaching you to think and to think for yourself.” Perhaps these views reflect the difference in what individual professors expect from students or the difference in theory (what the institution values) and practice (what actually happens).

Andrea assumes complete responsibility for her learning. She refuses to criticize teaching methods of professors and offered no suggestions as to how professors might enhance her learning. The closest she comes to criticism is to say that one professor’s exam questions were “quite wooly.”

The theme of life experiences and learning appears throughout the case study. Andrea’s interest in the political aspect of history is the result of growing up during the Depression and World War II. She refers to her life experiences as contributing to her general understanding of events.

Andrea believes that her values, beliefs, and opinions (formed through her life experiences) prevent her from looking at historical events from several perspectives. She said that she is “a bit too rigid” and doesn’t have the “mental agility” of younger students. However, I think Andrea is quite open to new ideas and other perspectives and discusses them in an extremely articulate way. I believe, in history classes, she disagrees with the professor as to the relative importance of economics and politics as the cause of particular historical events, and therefore, emphasizes the political aspect when writing papers.

Although I saw no evidence that Andrea’s mental dexterity was affected by age, her physical dexterity is affected. She said, “To take an exam where you have to really click along at a great speed, I’m not so good.” Andrea has arthritis. Some days her hands are stiff and she has difficulty writing. This affects her adversely when writing exams. Her eyesight has deteriorated. When she was in the fine arts class she had to sit in the front two or three rows to make a good identification. This was not always possible. At the same time, Andrea does not want or expect special consideration as a senior. She said:

I haven’t found any professors who had difficulty with having me or other seniors in the class, or even the young tutors. I mean I think the fact is age really has nothing to do with it. You’re there presumably because you want to be there and that should be sufficient. And you’ve met certain requirements to get there. And I’ve always sort of gone into a class with that in my mind. And I’ve never felt uncomfortable. I don’t know whether other seniors have or not but I don’t see why they should.

Throughout her life, Andrea has sought learning experiences especially in Art,

History, and French. Even though she says that she has doubted her ability to succeed at times, she approaches learning with a positive attitude, supreme confidence, enthusiasm, energy, and drive.

Fred

Fred is a 74 year-old man who was born in Hungary where his father had a trucking business. He was an only child. He left school at Grade 9 and took up a trade. During World War II Fred fought in the Hungarian army. Towards the end of the war he was captured by the Russians. During the forced march to Russia he escaped and eventually made his way to Germany. In Germany he obtained a Master's Diploma in Precision Mechanics "which was a big deal there at that time." Fred married and came to Canada in 1956 when "times were tough" in Germany. In Canada he became a Class A Mechanic in the automobile industry. Fred said, "When we came here, I was really sick of working in a factory and stuff like that and I knew a lot of about cars .. so I picked up another trade.... It was amazing. I could touch anything I wanted. I could do it just like that." He and his wife had three children, two girls and one boy. After 45 years of marriage Fred and his wife separated and he moved to a large city in 1990. He got a job driving a school bus and began university studies.

Previous Education

Fred believes that quitting school in Grade 9 was "the biggest, biggest, biggest mistake" he had ever made in his life. He said:

I have regretted it for ever and ever and ever and ever.... I caught up ... more or less.... I had courses so my education level was not sort of suffering because of that, but that was piecemeal thing. I couldn't say, "Hey I finished that."

In Canada, Fred obtained a high school diploma by correspondence. Receiving this diploma meant very much to him. Fred's voice was laden with emotion when he said:

Oh, I really loved it, geesh.... When I get home (after work) I could sit down (and) work two or three hours.... You wouldn't imagine, I did a French course from Grade 9 to Grade 13 by myself sitting in the kitchen.... Man was cold and the woodstove was on normal, but I still did it. And the Grade 13 was pretty tough and I got 55 out of it without talking to anybody.... And I had the push and ... the incentive to do well because I was so sorry that I dropped that school, you wouldn't believe.

Fred enjoyed English immensely. He said:

I really used to wonder about it. I think it was a Grade 10 course or something and we had that book, the issue of the mocking bird, and then worked that out, page by page by page through. And I wondered, man oh man, I was good at it and ... when you take a book apart like that ... then it's entirely different than when you just read it, right? And all the ideas and how people interact and what did they did do, and all of it. It was really, really fascinating.

Fred has taken a variety of continuing education courses over the years. He said:

I always was interested in learning something. I have never been without a night course or without a book going or something you know.... I went to high school

once ... because I heard about computer literacy ... and I said, “Now then, what is it all about?”

Starting University

Fred took a pre-university admission course in Sociology at university. Fred said, “I did a good B+ out of it, and I had to write an essay, which I didn’t do forever and ever and ever.” Subsequently, his application to university was accepted. He said, “I got a letter sent back here, hey, congratulations. You are accepted to ... Canada’s third largest university. Your family can be proud of you. Blah, blah, blah. Hey man, that was cool.” When Fred went to the main campus to register, he began to have doubts about going. It was a long distance from his home and he “didn’t like the atmosphere.” He said:

I went in the cafeteria and ... I had the feeling then, I want to move to a Canadian university, not an African university ... this mannerism and the flaunting around, this strange, strange, strange was overwhelming.... And then the whole university was so far apart.... And all that grey cement buildings.

Fred cancelled his courses and started at another university in the city. He found it much easier to find his way around this university. He said, “Everything is so handy, and you have that feeling that ... you’re in it.” He found people very helpful as well. Fred said, “Anywhere I went, anybody I talk to, nothing but friendly, helpful.... I think it is terrific.” Fred had an introductory course to the university in which “they showed us the libraries, and ... I was impressed ... a pretty neat place.” Still, Fred finds university libraries intimidating. He said:

I didn't get catch on how to locate the thing on the computer.... I got to learn that.... But I find that the library is awfully big and you get lost there and then you wander around there and then you go there, it's not there, and some books somewhere else and then you go down stairs again from the 9th floor, 10th floor, and it's intimidating but you got to put up with it.

Even though Fred finds the library intimidating he said, "I like to go to the library and work out there.... I love books from the ... first day I went to school."

Fred was overwhelmed when he started classes. He said:

I never thought it would be that tough.... Well I worked the school bus. That was about six hours out of my day. So I was finished about 5 o'clock, so I jumped in my car, and then I took three or four courses at the time.... I jumped in with two feet, and thought I'm gonna make it. I'm smart. I'm tough and all that, and you know what? Well I found out that it was not that easy.

Fred wrote about his thoughts and feelings in his journal:

My thoughts were mainly on a host of self-directed questioning rushing through my mind as I attended the first class. It was a very large class, comprising four to five hundred students.... I felt overwhelmed and wondered, "Am I doing the right thing? Am I up to par with all these people? Will I understand all that scientific language the professor will be likely using?"... However, the information to be absorbed came down like an avalanche and there was no more time for wondering about anything.... My feeling oscillated between the highest elation and deepest doubts. One minute I felt very special to be part of a privileged group that is most

likely very intelligent and gifted. I felt very excited to face the challenges and looked forward to successes that I hoped will follow. The next minute I felt overcome by the enormous task that would test my mental and academic abilities, and was not sure if I was up to it.

Fred is majoring in Psychology because he is very interested in why people behave as they do. He said:

Ever since I'm young, I always watch people.... Then I read about Freud ... oh brother, that's pretty good, made a lot of sense to me... And in the 70s, when Humanistic Psychology was created, I read a lot and I wished, oh man, if I didn't have to go to work I would do that.... But when I got to university I got the biggest surprise of my life.... They barely mentioned these people there, and Freud was more or less put aside and all these people put aside, everything that's not replicable and proven, that's not scientific.... But then I still think, "Well maybe there's still room for my interests if I can get into either emotions or ... personality development, why people do what they do."... I may sound ... not very scientific but so what. I think any hypothesis put up or a theory put up is not a scientific thing. It ... just turns out to be scientific only if it is deemed as value of the subject right? And adds to that scientific knowledge and then it turns out to be repeatable and the rest of it, you know. So, I don't think my line of thinking is that bad.

Fred has taken courses in Psychology, Sociology, German, Philosophy, and Computer Studies, and has about seven credits. Currently he is taking Psychology Statistics.

Attending Classes

Fred is having quite a lot of difficulty with Statistics. His agitation was quite evident as he spoke about it. While tapping his pen rapidly against his knuckles, he said:

I should know it by now, I am having a problem with it.... I am doing it second time already and it didn't work out very well, so ... I dropped out again, but I am still continuing, go to the classes, and hope to get the whole thing better and under control and then I'll try it again.

Fred attends statistics classes twice a week. Each time he goes there are six hours of classes, a three hour lecture, two hour workshop and one hour tutorial, back to back.

Attending these classes challenges Fred's endurance. He said:

So you got to pull myself together and it is a long haul and you better prepare yourself for it. You better eat enough before, and don't drink too much that you have to go out. All this goes in my head and then I can face it better. Then I am very realistic and I say, "Ok that's what I have to do, so that's what I do." And then it's ok. He doesn't even make a break ... in between the workshop and the (lecture). Then we rush down and get a coffee, get a bar of chocolate, and then, oh well, you drink your coffee, eat your chocolate, and listen to him. So that's ok. I can do that, you know.

Fred said that there was little difference between the workshop and the lecture. The workshop was designed to go through problems students were having. However, they ended up "having not a workshop but a lecture." The professor uses photocopied sections out of a text rather than a text book. Fred said, "These photocopies are clipped together

according to subjects ... so they're floating all over the place. So then you ... want that ... you can't flip back like in a book. That is ... a nuisance, but what can you do."

Fred believes he must adapt to a professor's style if he is going to be successful. He said, "I have to accept the professor ... and I have to adapt to his style, and I got to do what this person wants in order to get my mark and get the heck out of there."

Because Fred was having a great deal of difficulty learning Statistics, he had hired a tutor. This did not work out too well because the tutor did not help Fred with what he wanted to learn. He explained:

I spent lots of money, and it was a waste of time and money.... This guy ... disagreed with the whole approach.... But then he put an awful effort in it from the basic, and I understand what ... the whole thing is about. So he was more going about understanding, but then that was ok, and it helps me now, but it didn't help me at that time to do the test.... Then he had a style and then he got started he got carried away and he just talked and wrote and talked and wrote it down and I had a stack, a handful of sheets and I went home and I couldn't sort them out.... So it was sort of overwhelming so to speak.

Even though Fred is having difficulty with Statistics, he remains optimistic. He commented:

I'm still hoping that one of these days, I catch up and I do as well as I can, and then ... well at first it just shows you what kind of illusions you have in your head ... especially when you are out of school and all that, "Hey, I think I am pretty smart. I'm going for 80's at least."

Fred believes that the statistical approach is “more or less a self-serving exercise of the high flying Statisticians ... because when it comes to testing all sorts of angles of it, well the difference is so tiny at the end, I said, “Now are they really meaningful or significant the way they say they are?” Fred is frustrated in having to learn Statistics. He is interested in people’s behaviour and doesn’t see that numbers mean that much. He said:

Even if Statistics is ... a science ... it’s not so that it’s just what’s black and white in his book, that’s what it is. No. There is so many styles and so many different approaches that even people inside they argue against each other and have different views and all that.

Fred appreciates a professor who “expresses himself properly ... is interesting ... and gives you a little lift.” When Fred starts a course he assesses the whole environment, whether it is “agreeable” or “hostile.” He wrote in his journal:

First, I feel out the class, the size and the people in it, very quickly put the professor or instructor and the TA's in the proper perspective from my point of view. Then depending on the conclusion I reached, I can adjust my state of mind to the specific circumstances of the course. This way I can avoid wasting my time and energy about likes and dislikes and can concentrate getting the work done.

Fred took a German course in which he thought the professor used very creative techniques for teaching. He commented:

Well the teacher ... didn’t have a book. He made exercises and things up ... even with caricatures and pictures and stuff like that.... So then was written and visual and then you had to answer or describe in German what ... that scene represents....

Well if (you) don't have the vocabulary, it was pretty tough but he kept the vocabulary pretty simple.... He was innovative and then ... you learn what you learn and you use it right away.

A student complained about the professor's methods and, consequently, the professor was directed to "do exactly only what the book says." Fred said, "There was one book and it wasn't a hard book. It said all the rules and the grammar rules. And then you had ... to fill in the blanks and stuff like that." Fred preferred the professor's own methods. He said, "I found it more interesting the way he did it because you could use it and then he involved people in talking and everybody had to ... talk in German and tell him and all that."

Fred has a great deal of difficulty speaking in front of a group. When he took the pre-university admission course he had to give a talk on a paper that he was writing. He said:

So then I went up there and I was stiff ... and I knew the whole thing.... I read it so many times. I rewrote it.... And then I start talking and it was pretty good. The more I talked, the more I calmed down, you know. And then they asked questions.... Well then, I could pull myself together and answer all these questions.

Reticence in talking before a group prevents Fred from asking questions in class. He said:

That bugs me, really bugs me. Sometimes I got such a good question and soon as (the professor) ask(s) you what do you think of that, I could really say something, boy what a stupid thing. That ... is one very, very serious problem with me....

Sometimes I think maybe it's my accent.... So then I think maybe I don't talk proper ... or I can't make myself to be understood or something is wrong with my

speech.... This is absolutely stupid because I know there is nothing wrong with me.

Memorable Experiences

Difficulty in speaking before a group made giving a class presentation in French a very significant experience. Fred met the challenge successfully. He said:

It was tough, but it was terrific.... At that time, I work in a place, we constructed machinery to the automotive industry to cut plastic.... So I took all my tools and all my stuff on the van and I put on the blackboard, that's when you start to construct it, you make a stand, and you do that and you do that, and this is micrometre and you measure that here. And they liked it, all in French. Well then it was hard because you wanted to say something. You know what to say. You didn't know how to say it ... made you think, try hard.

Views of Professors

Fred believes that some professors can't see the perspective of students and so cannot get their ideas across. He said:

The main problem is they can't put themselves into the place of the person that they are teaching. Because they go off from their perspective and they know the stuff and they say ok you do this, you do that.... And that doesn't work with ... most people. I found out if I had apprentices and instructed them, show how everything works, and as I went along, ok, it's not ... how carefully you put the crankshaft in there ... but why do you have to do that. Because if you don't it jams

up all the gears. All along I had that style. I went from the point of this is what I would want to know if I have to learn.

Views of Exams

Fred has a great deal of trouble taking tests. He said:

I need a lot more time than the test gives me.... And there are lots of times after the test is done, that I knew that I should have known that. Why didn't I know that at that time?... I went to the special services and I wanted extra time of tests which they did give me ... but very limited because they told me I don't have any learning disabilities or anything like that so they give me 30 minutes but only on one occasion.... I am ... actually better now ... not so upset.... But even then I'm uptight because I have other tests that were not Statistics or having anything to do with numbers and that sort of thing, I always did much better.

Fred has begun to change his strategy when writing tests. His tutor had advised him to use self-talk to improve his performance on tests. Fred said, "I used the approach ... that you help yourself from the outside. You have knowledge that you have a problem and you don't fight it, and you don't waste energy on it." Fred described a statistics test where the approach worked. He said:

You can just start putting down whatever you know, and then probably most of it comes out, and then you still get some marks for it.... Even the last test I noticed it. I was starting to panic, and I said, "What the hell." I just started putting it down and all that and then it was ok, worked out fine, especially here where they give

you partial marks.

Although Fred dislikes writing tests, he enjoys writing essays. He said, “ I put lots of thought into it, lots of maybe emotions or convictions. Then ... if it comes out good, then, oh well, it’s approved sort of, what I thought, my views and whatever.”

Self-Evaluation

Fred believes that his strengths as a university student are that he is “very determined and has strong motivation and (is) working hard.” He said:

I don’t mind how much harder it takes, and this hard work I need to compensate for my so to speak slowness.... I just don’t grasp especially the mathematical ideas.... But let’s say, I am in the heaviest traffic and going on ice, I don’t have any problems. I am cool as anything and I can assess a split second everything.... So actually it is not so I can’t think fast if I need to. But this sort of stuff, I can’t, just can’t. I don’t know why. It comes and it just goes by my ears, doesn’t seem to go in my head, you know, and then I go home and look at it and do it over, and then eventually slowly it comes and (I) say, “Ah ha, that’s what it was. Why didn’t I understand it in the first place?”... Even with adding up I make mistakes you know. Oh brother, numbers don’t say something to me that much, you know. It is 82, 28, so what, you know. Then I have to say that’s got to be like that, that it cannot be like that, so there is no leeway in it. Now if I read an essay or a text book or any other thing, well there is leeway and then you can re-read it and if you get the main idea or ideas pretty good, you can use your own words to express it.

How Fred Learns Best

Fred believes that he learns best when a professor provides an overview of the course outlining the objectives and main topics that will be covered. He wrote in his journal:

This way I can ... use the lectures as a filling-in-the-details process and have an idea how the main points (will be) integrated. (This) helps me to understand concepts and theories better because I can make connections and predictions as where they go. I find that teaching method much better than the one where you start from page one and eventually after the last page trying to make sense out of those many details that were presented and had to be memorized.

What Impedes Fred's Learning

Fred wrote in his journal that the worst teaching method that not only impedes his learning but absolutely discourages him is when an instructor uses a very fast pace in a lecture.

I had two courses where not too many people, including me, could keep up with the note taking. So between trying to take notes and listening to the lecture much was being lost. These instructors eventually put copies of the lecture in the library. However, nothing can replace the learning that occurs during the process of your own hand writing.

How to Enhance Fred's Learning

Fred believes that there are a number of ways that he can improve his own learning. He needs to be more organized and persistent in studying. Fred said, "I tend to read and then, oh that's interesting, start reading and then get carried away and read something else and the time went by." He thinks he needs to manage his time better. Fred said, "Use the time properly to do stuff.... I got to buckle down and ... I was pretty good at it, but when I got that health problem that threw me a lot."

Fred believes that if he could participate in a study group he would learn much better. He said, "I see many young girls ... work together.... I think this is the best thing to go about it because the more they chew about it, the more they talk about it, the more they remember." However, Fred believes that his age is a deterrent in participating in such a group.

Fred suggested in his journal that professors give an overview of the course and explain "how it fits into the big picture." He said, "This will create more interest in the course and will encourage more participation in discussions which in turn creates enthusiasm that prompts one on to better learning."

Fred believes that course material must be concrete to enhance understanding. Using a psychology course as an example, he suggested that observing laboratory tests would help put the material into context. He said:

The course was tough ... lots of material and they went into genes and that. That was really out of this world. You couldn't make any connection ... when they mentioned lab tests and all that.... Ok they had their rats run around and they

measured and all that. That sort of makes some sense, but then when it comes to people with their recall words, you don't know how it is done. What I think should be done is that one should be able to go into ... these laboratory tests, just (as) an observer ... to see what is being done. Then ... you would know what all that is all about.... For me it would be helpful anyway.

Benefit of University

Fred believes that going to university is a rewarding and fulfilling experience. He said:

I think ... it's absolutely (the) most wonderful thing people can do.... The main thing is well, hey you getting it, you're making it, you're learning more, you're handling it better, then you have a good chance.... That's what I need.... I'm happy with myself, with my condition and ... makes me feel good... I am a better all-around person.... Your horizon gets wider. It frees you up to move more, gives you a lot of sort of emotional elbow room.”

Although the university experience has been rewarding and fulfilling, Fred has found going to university both financially and emotionally draining. He said, “No matter what it takes, if I have the money, and if I am healthy, and if I still can do it, I'll do it ... just for my own satisfaction. Because I need it badly that I do it, that I succeed.”

Goals and Future Plans

Fred is interested in going on in university as far as he can. He said, “I sort of

wanted to keep the door open if I am healthy, if I am lucky, and ... if I am still around.... If everything works out, well, go as far as I can. I push my limit.” In his journal, Fred wrote, “If the work and the gradual widening of one's horizons was enjoyed every step of the way. Then upon reaching that distant goal there will be a thrill of the life time waiting at the end of the road. That is the way I see it anyhow.”

My Reflections

Fred has a “burning desire” to succeed at university and obtain a degree and is confident in his ability to do so. His determination to succeed is evident in the fact that he is persisting with Statistics even though he has a great deal of difficulty with the subject. In doing this, I believe that he is trying to understand events in his own life. Both his and his wife’s parents had marital problems. As well, his own marriage has ended in divorce.

Fred demonstrates critical thinking when he questions the importance of Statistics in studying behaviour.” He believes there are other ways besides the statistical approach to study human behaviour.

Fred believes that his problems with Statistics result from the fact that he has never done well in Math. Besides never having done well in Math, I don’t think Fred has the basic foundation in it that is required to do Statistics since his final mathematics course was Grade 10 completed through correspondence. Fred loves ideas and finds meaning through reading and writing. Numbers do not hold meaning for Fred and so this may contribute to his difficulty in learning Statistics.

Fred blames himself for his problems in learning Statistics and refuses to criticize

teaching practices even though he may be quite justified in doing so. Six hours of statistics classes would challenge the endurance of any student. He is very reluctant to approach the professor or the TA for help. Rather, he has hired a private tutor even though he really could not afford to do so. Fred thinks that he has to adapt to the teaching style of the professor. He does not ever consider that the professor might change his teaching style to meet the needs of students.

At the same time, Fred recognizes good teaching when he sees it and is enthusiastic about the teaching methods used by the French and German teachers. Fred did not have trouble speaking in these classes. Perhaps the teaching methods used made learning so interesting that Fred forgot his discomfort in talking before a class.

Fred's love of learning is very evident in the way he speaks about literature and language courses he has taken. Because he is so interested in languages and literature, Fred may be much better off and enjoy university more if he were to study people's behaviour through these subjects rather than Psychology. In his response to reading this case study, Fred said that he had come to the same insight himself.

Richard

Richard is a 67 year old man who is enrolled in a doctoral program. He is married and has three sons, all of whom have graduated from university. Richard was born and grew up in the English speaking part of Montreal. His ancestors were from Russia. Richard explained, "My family were Russian Jews who came ... in the latter part of the 19th century and settled in Montreal and in Ottawa."

Previous Education

Richard graduated from university in 1950 with a BA. In university Richard was a B student. He laughed and said:

I was a good student when I was 12 and became an increasingly less good student as I got older only out of sheer bone laziness.... I almost flunked in my first year of university because I wasn't working very hard. I got a little come uppence there and that managed to sustain enough work to get a B average. But I certainly was not prepared to work any harder to get what might have been an A average.

Richard described these university years as “wonderful” and “lovely” although he is sure that they are “coloured by the rosy tint of time and memory.” Richard was art editor of the university newspaper and, in his last two years, worked for a small public relations company which “did brochures and that sort of thing for our clients and many of whom were in the fashion industry ... and for whom we put on fashion shows.” He added:

I had ... arrangements with the offices of my professors. Used to get calls saying, “You have a class this afternoon. You better get your ass up here.... I had a good boss and he let me off for three weeks at the end of the year and I crammed for my exams.... And so I was ... of the university and not of the university.... And on one level if I were to pursue ... that thought farther down my own life, it was probably replicated a number of times. I've never been satisfied being in one place, doing one thing. Today 46 years later, I'm running a business and going to school, going to art college and, as my grandmother used to say, trying to dance at all the weddings.

Work History

Throughout his career Richard has been involved in a variety of advertising and consulting businesses. At the time he began a Master's degree in Applied Psychology he had just sold his advertising business and started an outplacement counselling company with two partners. He said:

I had no qualifications for the business, but it's what I appear to do. I start businesses and see whether we can make them run.... By the end of the first year of the company ... I realized I didn't really like that work particularly although the Applied Psychology courses that I was taking were fascinating.

Now Richard is a partner in a consulting business that "advises companies and governments who want to approach and sell to ... older Canadians."

Why University Now

Returning to university signalled a turning point in Richard's life. He said:

In terms of learning, it's the most exciting time of my life.... When I realized in 1989, after my partners and I sold our business, that ... I didn't want to stop working although I was 59 at the time and I wanted to start learning. I really ... felt quite flat and quite stale. I had the sense that I hadn't a new thought for years.... I needed to find something that could sort of kick-start my brain again.... I did not want to simply go and take night courses in woodworking or something like that. I wanted to do something that would feed my interest in human behaviour and a whole bunch of other things. (This university) seemed like a logical place to be. It

is a school that, while it has been criticized for not having the academic rigour that a number of other more conservative institutions have, it also has a reputation ... of being able to colour outside the lines, that it did have a flexibility and it was a reasonably catholic environment ... that you could sort of make your own way.

Starting University

Richard “had no predetermination of what it was going to be like” when he first started back at university. He said:

Because I am a part-time student ... I am not to any great degree involved in the life of (the university).... I go to my classes when I have to go to my classes.... I was determined to get in.... I spent ... every bit of two days writing a ten page letter ... outlining why I wanted to be there. I don't think I have ever worked as focusedly and as scrupulously on a piece of writing as I did on this because ... I had indifferent marks and they were from another eon. And so I knew if anything was going to get me in, well it was two things. One was ... my ... two references.... I probably could have written an illiterate piece of work and gotten in with those two guys.... Anyway, I didn't really know what to expect, didn't know how I was going to be as a student. And I found out that, to my delight ... that almost everybody that I encountered was bright and curious and all of the things that are important in an academic environment.... Because I'm not afraid to talk, I found myself at ease in class having a good time, exchanging, debating and stuff like that. Richard believes that older adults “bring an interesting mature point of view ... to a

learning situation.” He said, “Since there’s as ... much appeal, as much nourishment in the classroom situation as there is in the reading, for me anyway, having interesting people in the class is a plus.” Richard believes that in a class of mature students there is “no fooling around.” He said, “ There is a lot of humour, but there is ... a very intense focus. People are there seriously. They’re there to improve their careers or like me ... to make sure that you don’t lose it ... to keep your mind alive.”

Choosing Courses

Initially, for his master’s degree, Richard had enrolled in Applied Psychology to study counselling because it fitted in with his current business. He became disenchanted with his work, sold the business, and transferred to Adult Education. He explained, “Almost coincident with that, I took a course ... Maturation and Adult Learning.... That course turned my head around. I became fascinated ... with the whole process of how ... we change as we grow, and how we learn and ... how we mature.” Now, Richard is enrolled in a doctorate program in Adult Education. Currently he is taking a course on consulting skills. Richard said:

I have been a consultant for a large part of my life but I’ve never read anything about consulting. I have no idea why I do what I do, and I’m not sure what I do that’s good and what I do that’s bad. This is a course that is telling me this. It is quite fascinating.

Last year Richard did an independent reading course and, at the same time, audited another course. He felt that if he had not attended some classes he “would have been an

unhappy guy.” He said, “I also wanted the intercourse of the class.... I wanted that exchange that really does feed me at university. I like class stuff. I’m voluble in class and I like giving people my opinion and I like debate. I would have been really lonely.”

Attending Classes

The consulting skills course is quite interactive. The professor uses role playing as a method of teaching. Richard said:

We break up into triads, quartets and it’s really interesting.... The purpose of that is to consult with each other.... We will meet three or four, five times.... It’s forcing me to articulate the things that I do in front of my peers and have them attacked or analyzed or examined.... There’s an area earlier in the course, we determined ... what it was about the consulting process that we wanted explored for ourselves and one of the other members of the group will advise us on that.

Richard received some feedback on his role as consultant which affected him significantly. He said:

This is a kind of a serious process. We’re all taking it seriously. I tried to take it less seriously than I should have and that was one of my problems. I expected to skim over it easily, and I didn’t and got caught.... I mean I really got skewered. Good and proper. And I won’t do that again.... By that time you’re good enough at whatever the hell it is you’re doing.... You’re surprised when the glib tongue doesn’t work ... and people can see through whatever almost unconscious games you play. Anyway she nailed it.... And I didn’t like it at all but I appreciated it very,

very much.

Richard intends to use her feedback in the next session. He said:

I am going to be giving some advice to my client in this quartet and we'll see ... whether I've learned or not.... I'll approach it differently.... I have already approached it differently and I will, I hope, continue to approach it differently.

There is also the issue ... that I need to be who I am. I mean there are elements of the way I approach a problem and the way I deal with people that are not, if not unchangeable, at least natural for me. And I have to make other changes or improvements within that context.

Attending Classes at Art College

Also, Richard goes to an art college where he studies water-colours. He said, "I've revived an interest in painting.... I like water colour. I like the risk of it because ... you do it and if you don't do it right, you're dead.... There's no floor on the number of courses you can take. So I take a course every semester and I'll be there for 20 years." When Richard applied for admission as a degree student at art school, he had an interview to which he brought his paintings. He said:

You show up with a ... hundred other people, 23 year-olds with purple hair in a large auditorium where there are members of the Art Faculty.... I had about a hundred paintings. So I came staggering in with this stuff.... One of the ironies was ... because a number of the art directors at advertising agencies in the city teach in the design section ... there were three or four guys there who used to work for me,

and I was getting a lot of razzing from ... those guys. As I was being interviewed they were all hooting from the other side of the room.

Attending classes at art college is totally different. Richard said, "It's mindless.... The less you think about what you paint, the better you paint. It is not an intellectual process."

Richard feels that he fits in at art college "not badly." He can always find two or three people with whom he can connect. On the other hand, painting is a "very solitary process." Richard said, "Once you're painting, you're painting. I mean, every 20 minutes or so you kind of walk away from your painting and walk around the room and look and see what other people are doing, always encouragingly, but you do it yourself."

Generally, Richard believes that instructors at art school are better teachers than professors at university although he is not sure why. He said:

They should be inarticulate, but they're not.... I have a guy now who is a teacher of water-colours who is a genius. I mean, I hate his work, but he really knows how to teach.... He has distilled what he knows into fairly simple terms.... He literally has demystified water colours for me.... What he does is review the work ... in front of everybody. He ... nails it up on the wall, and walks through it, and that's an hour. And the next two hours, you paint.

In the beginning, having his work reviewed in front of the class "scared the hell out of" Richard. He said:

I was surrounded by talented people. But he's very supportive. He's very interesting.... He never says bad things ... about any work.... So you end up feeling constructively supported.... Oh it's excellent feedback and you learn from what

other people have done and how they're doing it... And he ... really does explain it and he's very simple. He's very direct.... And he uses language well. But anyway ... he feeds you.... Gives you encouragement. Gives you information. Gives you ways to be better.

Memorable Experiences

One of the most significant things that returning to university has given Richard is the sense that he is smart. He said:

I'm good in class, I easily speak up. I haven't a shred of a reticence about voicing my opinion. The opinion is always well received, argued with ... never dismissed and I've come out with a sense ... there's no arrogance in it, that I am an asset to the class, that I more than pull my weight and that I make a difference in a class, my presence or my opinions or whatever, is important. Now I have not functioned in my life lacking confidence particularly, but this has been a wonderful reassurance for me because it's with what I consider to be smart people.

Views of Exams and Papers

Richard prefers to be evaluated by writing papers rather than exams. He said:

If I had to take exams I'd be cooked ... because I don't have a great memory....

Not the stress of it. I have been under worse stress than that. But the business of writing exams I think would not be attractive to me. But writing papers where I can plan and formulate ... has proved to be advantageous to me. It is appropriate

for the way I learn and for the way I express myself and for the way I use information.

Now Richard is an A student compared to being a B student in his undergraduate work.

He attributes the difference to being able to take courses in which he is interested. He said:

To some degree you are not always taking the subjects that you want to take in your undergrad.... In graduate school you're by and large reading those things and taking those courses that are of your choice....I t may also be ... that when you get older you have more history to hook into so that when ideas are presented to you ... many of them will have a familiarity or a resonance that will permit you to make better sense of them than you might have when you were younger.

Past Experiences and Current Learning

Richard believes that he brings special strengths, life skills, and experience to the class as a person over 60 that perhaps the 30 or 40 year old doesn't. He said:

You do bring to that kind of environment a point of view and analysis that isn't available to younger people, I'm sure, except the very exceptional. But even with them ... they haven't gone through the experiences that mature us.... It is not to say that automatically the 60 year old is smarter than the 30 year old. That is not the case at all. The 60 year old has ... a longer telescope to look through to examine things and is able to see elements that life has made familiar or that life has exposed him or her to.... For the older people in a learning environment, one, they're on one level special because they want to be there and that's become

important for them. Two, they've had to have some level of intellectual attainment in order to be able to get in. Therefore, I don't know how strong a corollary it is, but therefore the people who are there who are older are confidently older. They're people who have come to at least in part understand who they are and what they can do and what their strengths are and what their weaknesses are.... They are I think comfortable in their own skins as the French say.

How Richard Learns Best

Richard has good insight into how he learns best. He said:

It may be a personal thing, but I suspect it's also a product of my age and some degree of maturity, and that is, I need a very modest amount of structure, but beyond that I learn better on my own or collaboratively with other students. My pleasure in this process of re-educating myself, is as much with the course work and the class work as it is with any other aspect of it. I mean I enjoy the reading and I enjoy the research and so on, but I'm most stimulated by the class environment which with 25 adults, all of them bright enough to get into graduate school, exchanging views and, in many cases because the age of the students is quite high, in most cases exchanging the products of life experiences as well.

In the course of his studies Richard has discovered that, as a learner, he is a reader.

He said:

I learned that ... although it seems a contradiction ... I need to read for the reassurance that the printed word gives to me, but I learn by experience. I learn by

talking about it and by living it and so on.... But I know that I love reading, and I like the reading assignments because I'm learning new stuff. I mean there isn't ... a bigger kick intellectually than finding out new things. I mean, my god, what a better way to keep your brain alive than finding out things you didn't know, especially about, in a sense, yourself.

Richard commented that he has "always had a lousy memory." He said:

As a matter of fact my memory is probably better now since I've gone back to school and I think there is ... a use-it-or-lose-it characteristic to memory.... I think that we tend to get intellectually soft because the things that we do or the things that we read become easier for us that we don't have to stretch as much.

Richards accepts his "lousy memory" and is not interested in trying to improve it. He said:

I don't have the patience. I don't have the self-discipline to do anything like that.

Memory is memory is memory. I don't think it's a trained thing, although maybe it is and I don't know that. No. I just think that if you are using your mind a lot and in a range of areas, you are just firing more cells, that's all, and so I think you become ... a more interested person and therefore your memory is fresher.

Relationships With Professors

Richard enjoys good relationships with professors. In one sense Richard sees himself as having a peer relationship with professors. At the same time, Richard recognizes that there is a relationship between student and professor which is more hierarchical. He explained:

On one level I think of the professors ... as peers. Societally we are peers. Intellectually we may be peers. However they come with a body of knowledge ... that I want to access. Some of that knowledge is available through the texts, perhaps the more important part is their experience and their knowledge in the field.

Richard was offended when the professor did not show up for class and had sent one of his former students to substitute for him. He said:

I was offended because the student was there purporting to teach us and I was surprised to learn, because I polled my quartet, that all three of them were offended as well.... Anyway we politely revolted. At the break we said that we were going to do our quartet work and not come back after the break for the class.... I'm not there to ... have my equal lecture me. I'm there to have ... on one level my better, lecture me ... or however the process is..... I think it reflects badly on the professor.

Benefits of University

Richard has found going to university to be one of the most exciting times of his life. He said, "The whole process has been incredibly stimulating for me. I mean it revived my appetite for learning which I hadn't really had since the sort of early days of my business career. So I really count myself fortunate." Going to university and to art college provides Richard with a means of self-enhancement and self-fulfilment. He explained:

The art is not consuming for me. I don't need to be an artist. I just get pleasure

from it and I have developed a modest skill at it, talent is too strong a word. And the same is true of university. I'm not, although there is a connection between it and the work I do... I'm not doing it for career enhancement.... And that's what makes the difference. I think (that is) the most profound difference between the adult learner and the to-be-an adult learner, because you really are doing it as in the very best interpretation of self-indulgence. I mean it really is to feed yourself.

Goals and Future Plans

Regarding his thesis for his doctorate, Richard's goals are "really ill-formed at this point." Richard said:

I'd really like to do something interesting. I really would like to do something that hasn't been done before. I'm not sure that I have the intellect to do that, but I really would like to. There are a few sort of ideas that are floating in my head that are so complicated and so profound that I know they are just not achievable. I have some notions about, for example, about the maturity of entire societies. I have a sense that the Americans are an adolescent society and really it has nothing to do with how long they have been around because they have been around longer than ... Canadians have. I think Canadian society is a more mature society than the American society is.... Now this is not a doctoral thesis. This is a life work. You know somebody at the age of 30 should be undertaking to do this. But it flows out of the reading that I've done on adult growth, you know, and I look around and when you see whole societies behaving in the same way that individuals do, then

you begin to wonder well maybe there's something's happening there.... So that would be an interesting thing to pursue. I don't know how the hell you would do it.... So I'll end up with something much more pedestrian, hopefully original, and it'll have something to do with adult development.

My Reflections

A major theme in Richard's experiences is learning as nourishment. Richard recognized this theme himself.

Richard is very practical and self-directed in choosing courses. He gives the impression that he has a clear vision of what he wants to learn and goes after it. He takes courses that he can apply practically to his business.

Richard emphasizes the importance of experience and life skills in learning and says that this gives older adults a distinct advantage in the classroom. He believes that life experiences ought to be the basis for learning and is critical of universities that do not emphasize this.

Richard appreciates professors who are supportive, give positive feedback, and use simple language without jargon. He is not tolerant of poor teaching practices and walked out of class when a substitute instructor came without notice. I believe that he would have preferred the professor to consult with the class on how to handle that particular session.

Richard is very creative and a risk-taker. His creativity and risk-taking show through in his art and in his work life. This creativity and risk-taking is nourished at university where Richard is encouraged to "colour outside the lines."

Jessica

Jessica is a 72 year old woman who grew up in the suburbs of a large metropolitan city. After high school, she worked as a stenographer for a few years. She married and moved to England for six months while her husband trained for a new job that he had taken in Canada. Jessica found this “a marvelous experience” because she “got to make new friends” and “meet other tourists” at the country hotel in which they lived. Upon returning to Canada, Jessica and her husband lived in the suburbs where they raised three children, all of whom attended university. Once Jessica’s first child was born she stayed at home to be a wife and mother. Jessica is very active in volunteer work and has managed to keep this up while taking university courses. She said, “The big thing ... that’s taken up the last ... eight years has been involved with violence, women and children living in shelters.” Jessica and her husband are very involved in church life. He husband is a church warden and she sings in the choir.

Previous Education

Jessica graduated from a commercial program in high school. She maintained her interest in learning and attended night school to study courses of interest, one of which was French. She had an opportunity to stay with a family in Quebec where she practised speaking French. She said, “That was quite an education because (they) didn’t speak English. I had to communicate and it was difficult because even though you study it in school, you don’t use it the way you need to in conversation and just being in that milieu was an education in itself.” Jessica took singing lessons as well and sang in a professional

choir. She noted, "That was a learning experience which I really enjoyed because with a choir of that size, you can do much bigger works. It's an entirely different experience from a small church choir." Jessica gave up singing in this choir because ... the choir schedule conflicted with her husband's job obligations. She said:

I missed it, but at the same time, I enjoyed what we were doing.... John traveled and often I went with him and it was very interesting ... mostly North America and England. And then our roots were there. My parents came from England. I had cousins there, and we made a lot of personal friends there through the company.

Starting University

With the encouragement of her family, Jessica started university in 1986. She was "the only one in the family who hadn't been to the university" so she decided to "have a crack at it too." Jessica took a preuniversity admission course in Canadian History and liked it so much that she decided to major in History. She said, "It was a good class because people were there because they wanted to be. Some of them were mature students who wanted to advance themselves... So the attitude was good.... And he was an excellent teacher. So that got me going."

Jessica had a very unsettling experience during the first week she started university when she was locked in a stairwell. She related what happened.

I went through the exit door into the stair well and I walked down a couple of floors and the door was locked behind me and in front of me, and I couldn't get out. So the passage where I was had a window into the library and I rapped on the

window and got a student to come to the window.... She didn't know what to do.... I said, "Go and get the librarian." Well the librarian was quite indifferent.... There was an exit door and it said, "In Emergencies Only." It will set off the fire alarm or something like that. And I didn't want to push it. But, eventually of course, that's the way I got out and no alarm went off.... The funny thing was there was an empty pop can sitting on the stairwell, and I wondered who had left it there and how it got there. However, that was one of my first experiences and one I won't forget.... So it was a learning experience right away.

Although Jessica enjoyed attending classes, she felt confused and alone. She said:

Well I enjoyed it. The thing that stands out most is perhaps a little confusion....

Just finding my way around the university. The other thing ... because I was only part-time, I didn't have the feeling of community that full-time students have and I really noticed that because very often I would be eating my lunch alone whereas all around me students would be meeting socially and meeting in groups.

Jessica found the first year or two really quite terrifying. She never knew quite what to expect. She said:

A part of it was purely physical, finding your way around. The campus is very big and it's very easy to get lost. Some of the buildings are just a labyrinth.... The other ... was the difficulty of getting from a lecture to a tutorial in time. You're allowed 10 minutes but one year I had a lecture on the third floor of ... a big old building. In the winter you have your coat and gloves and bag. I had to go from there to the third floor of (another building) in 10 minutes. I don't think I ever

really made it. I would arrive gasping for the tutorial.... When you're new, those things are a bit upsetting and worrying.

Jessica said that “the fear of the unknown is the hardest thing to deal with.” She explained:

There are a lot of unknowns, physical, mental, psychological.... I suppose one of the greatest fears is, can you cope with the amount of work that you have to do? Are you going to be able to get through the amount of reading in the amount of time? And will you be able to understand what you are supposed to be reading? Eventually you get a little more friendly with the other students and share what you've gone through with them so those things open doors.... But very often you find too, that everybody is struggling with the same things, and that's very comforting.

Choosing Courses

Jessica chooses courses in which classes are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays. She said, “It's become a joke. The family say that I am graduating in Tuesdays and Thursdays because it takes a lot of time traveling.... So I have tried to pick courses that didn't require me to be down town three days a week.” When Jessica is ready to choose her courses she visits the counselor for seniors. She explained:

I get the syllabus and I go down to the counselor.... And she is very experienced, special needs like. She's wonderful ... very pleasant ... quite well organized.... And she knows what the requirements are.... It would be very easy if you were picking

courses to make a mistake.... I would never like to take a course where it requires a prerequisite and I don't have it.... I can't just jump into a course.

Jessica has one and a half credits left to complete her B.A. She will have a major in History and a minor in Women's Studies. Jessica has spent over 10 years working on her degree because, since her husband is retired, they take a holiday every two years. She said, "Given my choice I would like to have gone straight through and finished it.... But you know, you compromise with these things, and you work them in as best you can."

Currently Jessica is taking a history course, Crime and Society in England. There are about 70 students in the course in which classes are held once weekly. The professor usually lectures for one and one-half hours and then answers questions. Jessica said, "It's funny, the ... teaching is changing over the weeks. To begin with the professor didn't seem to want to encourage questions. He wanted to get through the lecture ... but he has changed in the last week or two, so he's almost encouraging more dialogue, which is what he said he was going to do in the beginning." Jessica enjoys lectures depending on the lecturer. She said, "For the most part they have all been very good.... Some of them talk so fast I've used a tape recorder.... I haven't been able to keep up with note-taking." Jessica finds it very difficult to concentrate "if there are students who chatter a lot" and is "amazed at how people can talk through a lecture and still keep up with the course." Jessica believes that tutorials "are a good learning experience because you're learning in small groups. You're participating. You're contributing." She also appreciates the opportunity to make a presentation in class herself. "Teaching something is different from listening, isn't it?" Jessica said. She believes that lectures and tutorials complement each

other.

Jessica has found that tutorials run by the professor himself offer an opportunity to get to know the professor better. She said, “So often in a large university you never really get to know the professors too well especially if you’re part-time.” Occasionally Jessica has audited a course when she felt she couldn’t cope with it. She said, “But I found with auditing that it was only satisfactory to a point. You are just a spectator really. You learn much better from mistakes, from having papers marked, for being able to go and talk.”

Views of Professors

Jessica has found that, on the whole, her professors have been excellent. She prefers professors who “encourage dialogue,” “establish a real enthusiasm and real rapport with the students,” and are “very personally interested in the students.” Jessica found one professor quite reserved. She said. “She was rather hard to follow and she was terribly reserved and so I found that a little difficult.... I didn’t find her style very easy or encouraging.”

Memorable Experiences

Jessica took a women’s studies course when she first started university. Women’s Studies was quite an “eye opener” for Jessica. She said:

I came from an older generation and I felt quite uneasy about a lot of what I was studying ... because it seemed so condemnatory of men.... It was a completely different perspective and it took me quite a while to learn the vocabulary, to

understand what they were saying and to see that it wasn't threatening.

In this course, Jessica was required to do a practicum. She chose to work in a women's shelter. "So that was a whole new world... You had to keep a journal and you submitted your journal and you were marked on that," Jessica said. This course changed Jessica's perspective on feminism. She said, "I'm not ... a militant feminist but I certainly see things in a very different light. It's changed my view of women in every area."

Jessica took a course on Skills Research which was quite devastating for her. She was given zero on the first assignment that she handed in. Jessica said:

I have never ever got zero on anything.... But I think what she was trying to tell us was that we weren't doing well enough and better get cracking.... But I ... had an interview with her and I showed her my paper work apart from what I had submitted and she said, "Oh well, if I'd known that you had done all that I might have given you a different mark." Maybe I'm not being fair, but I found her deliberately intimidating.... Anyway I finally decided that whatever she wanted I wasn't doing it and I decided that I would drop the course ... and just audit it.... It's never a waste. You always learn something but it certainly doesn't do much for your morale. I can tell you that.

Jessica was "embarrassed, shocked, and disappointed" when she got zero on the assignment. She said:

I couldn't believe it. The other students that I had been working with were equally shocked because ... we had sort of worked on the same material, done a lot of the same things.... I was devastated, but you try not to take these things personally.... I

guess ... being a librarian is not an easy job.

Jessica thought that this experience was an important lesson for her. She said, "Sometimes failures are your biggest successes because you learn a lot from them.... You learn things about yourself from crises that you never learn in the ordinary way."

Jessica had one experience in a women's history course where she thought that she was not marked fairly on a paper. She explained:

I had done a lot of research (on) Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War.... I got 69. I thought I should have got at least 75. From my previous essay, I figured I'd done pretty well. One of the students sitting next to me said, "I can't understand it. I got 85. I didn't do as nearly as much work as you did." I thought, "You know, if they gave me 69, they could have given me 70." Which would have been another grade up, but I was too proud to go and fight for it....I didn't go and I've always regretted it ... but it is just not in my nature.

Study Habits and Learning Strategies

Jessica tries to be conscientious about studying. She said, "I try to be disciplined and give it a number of hours every week and not let it slide. I try not to get behind.... Very often when I'm taking two courses, I'll have an hour between courses or between tutorials when I can go to the library and read and research." Jessica thinks she is "a plodder" and said, "For the most part I don't grasp things quickly. I have to take it at my own speed. I have to review it."

Jessica has tried to develop techniques for remembering to aid in studying. She

said:

What I try to do ... is concentrate before an exam on specific things so that I will remember them. Well you might remember a specific story or an event that will help you to recall names, dates, places. It will help you to focus on what you need to remember, put it in context. Stories are great things to help you remember things. And if it's something vivid you're more likely to remember than something abstract, something that moves you emotionally.

Views of Exams

Although Jessica does not like exams (on a test in Classical Mythology Jessica was so anxious she “just sat numb”), she feels that they make her work harder and tell her how well she is doing. She said, “I want to know where I am weak and where I am strong, and there's a certain satisfaction in writing a good exam.” Jessica discovered that she had to learn to shut out distractions in the environment in order to concentrate on the exam. She said, “I think, being a wife and a mother, you learn to cope with a lot of things at one time. So you are responding to distractions, not shutting them out.” Jessica believes that young people have no problem concentrating. She said, “They can sit down and can read something while all hell is going on around them and never hear it and that's something that you have to develop again as you get older.” Jessica's family has been very supportive especially at exam time. She said, “It's given our family another dimension. It's brought us closer together in some ways.... They ... start to relive their experiences and I hear all about their triumphs and their trials, and so I can empathize and they can empathize with

mine.”

Self-Evaluation

Jessica was surprised at what she has learned about her own abilities while going to university. She laughed and said:

I have learned that I can succeed after all, survived, maybe that is the right word, essays and exams.... Another thing I've learned too is that now it's broadened my experience and I've listened to things maybe on the radio and I can relate to them or understand them in a way that I never could before.

Jessica considers the process of learning more important than what she learns. She said, “One of the things of course is knowing how to go to the library and find material and find relevant material, how to be selective.” Jessica considers herself an average student. Most of her marks “have been very B-ish.” Managing her time has been a real challenge. Jessica said, “That’s a skill and ... a discipline.... I have on occasion worked right through the night to finish something.... When you succeed it’s very good for the morale, for the ego, and when you don’t, it’s very difficult.” Jessica hopes that she handles difficult moments with maturity. She laughed and said, “After all, I have lived long enough to know that you can survive a lot of things. Mostly it’s your pride that’s hurt ... and if I fail, it doesn’t have to go on the front page of the newspapers.”

How Jessica Learns Best

Jessica thinks that she learns best when professors bring enthusiasm to the class

and offer her encouragement. She said, “Students are fed on that enthusiasm and encouraged.” Professors “who encourage students to come and see them apart from class time” are very helpful. Jessica feels that professors who “find that the time is so limited that they just don’t have much time for questions and answers, to get through the material” provide “a very negative experience.”

What Hinders Jessica’s Learning

Jessica thinks that professors who talk too quickly or are not good speakers create problems for her learning. She said, “I have, in some cases, used a tape recorder but if they’re speaking very quickly, you really don’t have time to hear what they’re saying and write it down at the same time. And that’s hard.”

Jessica’s learning is hindered if she does not like a professor’s personality. She said:

I had another professor ... in Women’s Studies, who was ... terribly egotistical. And it really interfered with the learning process. Just as an example, we had a classroom test. Now a classroom test is usually 50 minutes ... and you have to concentrate to get your answers down on time.... This professor interrupted, I think, four times with something that was already on the paper. And it was so distracting because she would break into your train of thought. Afterwards several people said, “You know, that’s just ego demanding attention.” We didn’t need that at all. It was really quite destructive.

Jessica’s biggest complaint about what interfered with her learning was the

weather. She said:

The weather is a big, big problem in the winter, just the problem of getting there. It seems quite small but one of the problems I've found in the winter is having to carry all my clothes with me in the classroom and then going out to another classroom in another building and it's time consuming.... You have ... to keep your boots on and sitting indoors all day with your boots on is not much fun. It becomes tiring, but you adjust.

How to Enhance Jessica's Learning

Jessica believes that her learning could be improved if professors would forbid talking during lectures. She found that if talking in class were ignored "it intends to increase and to continue." Jessica has found this "very disconcerting" and has spoken to students herself when they've been sitting near her. She said, "I don't do that kind of thing normally but it's very rude if nothing else. Whatever they have to say, if they don't want to listen to the lecture they shouldn't be there.... It's really very insulting to the professors."

Relationship With Younger Students

Jessica loves being with younger people in classes. She said, "I find once we're working on a class together age doesn't really matter. We're sharing the same problems. And the differences in age just seem to disappear."

Benefits of University

Going to university has been a very positive experience for Jessica. It has broadened her interests beyond housekeeping issues and raising children. She said:

Now I tend to look at political matters and even some scientific matters and art....

So that's really been a big plus, expanded my horizons.... I really love being down there.... It's been a wonderful experience. And I look forward to it every year, and it's therapy for me. It's a change from my everyday life, from housework, from suburbia, from being a housewife and a mother and all the usual duties that entails and it takes me into another world. And I find it very stimulating.... I'm very grateful for the opportunity.

Goals and Future Plans

Jessica's immediate goal is to complete the one and one-half credits of her degree. A goal is very important to Jessica because "a lot of what I do is volunteer work, and it just goes on and on and on." She explained, "If you don't have a goal and you don't have something to struggle for, then you never improve. If things come easily, well then ... there's no sense of achievement.... There's the sense that 'Wow, I never thought I could do this'." Once Jessica finishes her degree she would like to get her husband involved in education. She said:

(My husband) has a very good mind. He's quite brilliant. He's one of these students who were always in the top of the class.... And I think that with (his) kind of ability he should be studying again. So when ... I do achieve this goal, that's one

thing that I might do. I can't think of not going on studying. That would be unthinkable. So I am not sure which turn it will take. There are lots of options. I could do postgraduate studies which I would enjoy. But there are lots of courses now that are open to seniors. They're non-credit.... Then there are the Elderhostels and that's another possibility.... Lots of opportunities."

My Reflections

A theme throughout my interviews with Jessica was that going to university has shown her "a whole new world." University has broadened her horizons and expanded her interests. Her experiences have resulted in being more knowledgeable about what is happening in the world.

Jessica views every experience in her life as a learning opportunity. She describes traveling to England, singing in a professional choir, being locked in the stairwell, working in a women's shelter, getting zero on a paper, all as learning experiences.

Jessica has found going to university a lonely experience. She described several instances where she felt alone, such as sitting and reading during lunch while groups of younger students ate together and talked. She felt her part-time status prevented her from meeting other students since she could not attend extracurricular activities because of bus/train schedules and family commitments.

Jessica judges how good a professor is by whether they take a personal interest in students. She praises one professor who made a point to meet with her students and was easily approached. The closest Jessica came to criticizing a professor was when she

described one as being “terribly reserved.” She found that “a bit difficult.”

Jessica refuses to complain about the teaching practices of professors. She said that lectures were very good, but in the same breath said that some professors talked so fast that she could not keep up with her notes and so had resorted to the use of tape recorder. Jessica is very forgiving. She excuses the professor who gave her zero by saying, “I guess ... being a librarian is not an easy job.” In this instance I believe that Jessica was a victim of age discrimination since other students with whom she had been working did not receive a mark of zero. Handing in any work should have been worth some marks.

Jeremiah

Jeremiah is a 76 year old man of Native Indian heritage who was born and raised on an Indian Reserve. He went to public school there but had to leave the reservation to attend high school. Jeremiah had to work to earn money to pay tuition because his parents did not pay school taxes, making him ineligible for government paid education. He said:

A couple of years later I made arrangements ... to move to (a city) and I went to school there.... Even after I started back I had to stay out because I'd get behind in my finances.... I got a job in a furniture factory at 17 cents an hour. So I worked five hours for 85 cents a day but you could go home and eat at night and eat up 85 cents worth of food and didn't leave much for breakfast or dinner or for clothes or for rent or books. So I got to stay out and catch up and then go back the next year. But that was alright. I got on fine.

After Jeremiah finished four years of high school he started college in the United States.

He said, "I was there probably two or three months and I got sick, and I came back. I was in hospital for awhile but I got over it and got well and so then I joined the Air Force."

At the end of World War II Jeremiah attended university as a veteran and obtained a Bachelor of Commerce degree. In the early 1950's Jeremiah and his wife moved to New York where he started a grain brokerage business. His wife passed away in 1980. In 1990 Jeremiah returned to Canada and settled in a large city to go to university. Jeremiah said, "I wanted to study History and ... I have a soft spot in my heart for this university because I went here first." Jeremiah has a daughter living in "silicone valley" and a son who has recently moved to the city to be closer to him.

War Experience

Jeremiah joined the Air Force in 1941, and trained as a flying instructor. He relied heavily on his memory to pass exams. He said:

When I go in the Air Force all the fellows that I was training against were university graduates and here I was with not a Senior Matric yet. And there was some of those subjects that ... I couldn't see through. In Physics and stuff like that you had to learn the theory of light and weather.... So I had to memorize.... I got to understand it because I stayed with the subjects afterwards. But it was important. If I didn't, I wasn't going to graduate with them. I wasn't going to be where I wanted to be. I wasn't going get a commission.... So that I had to train myself ... to remember and I could.

Work History

Jeremiah operated a grain brokerage business in New York until he retired. Having to work for his high school education taught him to be resourceful. He learned that he had to look out for himself and consequently chose to be self-employed. Now that Jeremiah is retired, he helps young people research business opportunities on a volunteer basis.

Why University Now

Jeremiah returned to university to pursue questions he has about the meaning of life. He is doing this through the study of History, Philosophy, and Economics. From 1990 to 1994 Jeremiah completed an honours degree with a specialist in History. He said:

I guess the reason I went back to study History in the first place was I was always curious about where we got our way of thinking, where we got our values and everything like that. We didn't just come up with them when we were born and our parents, they didn't either.

Jeremiah continues to take courses that interest him. He is registered in courses at two universities and one community college to do this.

Starting University

Jeremiah wasn't sure how he was going to get along going back to university after so many years. He said:

I hadn't written an essay in 40 years ... and I wasn't too good at it even 40 years ago. So I had some questions in my mind about whether - but when I make up my

mind to do something I pretty well go ahead and do it. I had no thoughts of not making it. Maybe I should have but I didn't and maybe that's what helped me there too.

Courses Taken

As a history specialist, Jeremiah studied both the Old and New Testaments. He was given credit for the first year because of his previous university education. However, he took some first year computer, history, and English courses because he thought that he needed them as a basis for his studies. He said, "Early Greek History where you study about all the gods that they had - in order to understand their thinking in their later philosophy I had to have ... a background in that." Since finishing his B.A., Jeremiah has taken courses in Philosophy, Ancient Near East History, and Computer Science. He said:

Even when I ... got the degree ... the questions were still not answered. So I had to go back further and further, which was the Old Testament study.... But I found it supplied a lot of answers to the questions I had in my mind, but really the law and philosophy and everything started back then. That was the first recordings of it anyway.

Jeremiah chose to study the Old Testament in a history course rather than a religious studies program because he didn't want "any denominational spin to be put on it." He said, "I wanted to learn it from a historical and an economic point of view. I was very interested in the economic situation ... under which these people lived."

Also, Jeremiah chooses courses that have a practical application such as Computer

Science and Financial Management. Currently, he is taking a course on Financial Management so that he can help some young men research the viability of starting a computer business. He said, “There’s a different way of looking at financial statements, balance sheets and making projections for the future which you have to do now if you’re gonna get any kind of credit at financial institutions. I went back for that reason.”

Attending Classes

Jeremiah is very pleased with what he is learning in the financial management course. It is “quite comprehensive” and the professor does “a good job of teaching.” He said:

We have a big plastic book that covers all this and we have to read several chapters beforehand and then he goes over it on the blackboard with us on all these formulas and things like that and tries to make sure we understand it. I’m not sure we always do but then they have ... a tutorial that is available on the weekends.

Jeremiah finds that when he takes problems to the teaching assistants during tutorials “sometimes they can help, sometimes they cannot.” He said, “Even if I understand the thing I just love to - I like to go and bring up some questions to make sure that things are as clear to me as they should be.”

Jeremiah has found quite a difference in attending classes now as compared to the time he completed his commerce degree. He said:

When I went through the first time ... most of the guys were my own age then,

veterans coming back. They were an older group. They had seemed to have a lot more determination and a lot more curiosity than the ones I went back with this time, and I wondered just how prepared these students were for university.

Jeremiah is very concerned that lectures do not foster inquisitiveness and critical thinking skills. He believes that people learn best in discussion groups where they would have the chance to raise questions arising from their life experiences. He said:

I wondered sometimes in my mind if it wouldn't be a good idea if you had a gap between high school and when a student could start university so they would have a little time to ... experience life in the workplace and maybe think about things, raise some questions in their mind, and come back to the university to attempt to get answers to it. Being in school all their lives ... I thought at least, they were just trained to listen to somebody and try and remember what they said and when exam time came give it back to them. So if you had a good memory you could do quite well without raising any questions in your mind at all. If I have a complaint about university that would be it.

In general, what Jeremiah brings to the classroom as an older adult with diverse life experiences is unacknowledged in the classroom. He was thinking of one particular history professor when he said:

I don't think he thought of me any differently than these kids coming out of high school. I mean, he never inquired about whether I had any other thoughts other than what we went over, what he brought into the class.... I didn't hold it against him because I thought that probably he was trained to think that way so I could ...

make an allowance for that.

Jeremiah believes that his learning experiences could have been richer if the professor had acknowledged his past experiences. He said:

As a matter of fact there were some other ... professors that just took the opposite view. I mean they were really glad that I was in the class and they thought that I brought something to the class that maybe somebody at the ... average age there wouldn't have. I remember particularly in one class the professor, at the end of the year, he said that he was going to do something that he had never ever done before. He was going to give out a prize to the student that he thought brought the most to the class through questions and things like this.... So we were all there when he was going to give it out this night, you know, we were all wondering who was going to get it. And he gave it to me.

This professor believed that Jeremiah's contribution to the classroom was substantial and represented real benefits to the learning environment for everyone in the class.

Using Computers

Jeremiah embraced new technology when he returned to university. He did not know how to use a computer and immediately took courses to learn. He said, "Fortunately I learned to type when I went to high school and I didn't forget it entirely although my speed dropped off quite a lot." Jeremiah has taken several computer science courses over the years. He said, "Even now, I'll likely go back because the thing is changing so fast that I find that I need to brush up on it ... in order to keep up with it." Now he is quite

knowledgeable and uses the Internet for research.

Initially, Jeremiah found learning about computers quite difficult. The professor used language that he did not understand. Rather than going to the professor to obtain help, he went to two girls in the class. He said:

It's surprising, I learned more from them than I did the instructor. I guess the instructor had so much to go over during class and he had a way of teaching that just didn't fit into my mind quite well.... I could ask basic questions and they could answer at my level, whereas the instructor was probably somewhere at some other level.

Jeremiah blamed his lack of knowledge of computer language for his difficulties. He said:

A lot of these students had already used them.... I think probably he just assumed that with everybody because it's most of the students there.... I couldn't catch up through him because he had to take all his time and present his course to his class there. So he didn't have any time to go back with me or even after his class....I'm not blaming the instructor at all. No, no, no, no. It was probably a little advanced for me, you see.

Jeremiah was determined to master using a computer. He said, "I had to learn to use it so I just made up my mind to.... It was something I had to do.... So I did it."

Recently, Jeremiah took a course about the Internet at a local college. He thought that the professors had a "very efficient way of teaching." There were "four or five instructors" who took part in each class. Jeremiah said:

In the lecture part of it...one would lecture and then the other one would take over

and lecture on part of it, and - oh they wouldn't all get up in one night.... They lectured for awhile ... and then they'd say, "Alright, let's go to the computers and do it." So if the session is three hours long, why you might spend two hours on the computer.

Jeremiah found that both the handouts and personal instruction were very helpful. He said:

They gave us handouts for the next session, and we could go over those and read them.... Then we had kind of an understanding of what they were driving at. I think that was important.... If we had a problem once we get to the computer, well then they are right there ... to help you out.

Now Jeremiah uses the Internet frequently to research topics of interest. He said:

I used it a lot last year in studying the Old Testament.... But it's got so much information there now that it's quite important that you know how to search for it. There's a lot of search engines on there now.... If you don't know how to use these search engines properly, it would be like turning you loose into a great big library blindfolded and say, "Well, all the books are here. Here's all the knowledge, go to it."

Views of Professors

Jeremiah thinks that it is the responsibility of professors to prepare students to be responsible citizens. He is critical of professors for not asking students how things could have been different in history, what might have been done better, and how the events of history affect our lives today. He said:

As a matter of fact I brought it up in the history class.... It was a small class, maybe 18 or 20. The professor was quite a nice fellow and we could ask him any questions.... We were learning about the economics and politics of Canada ... and so I said, "Professor, we've studied all this history ... the weaknesses of our country, what the government did wrong, what the churches did wrong, and the municipalities and all this. What are we supposed to do with that knowledge? Are we supposed to try to make things better? Or we just work hard and get as high a mark as we can on the exam and then forget about it all?"... He was lost for awhile.... He didn't know exactly how to answer me.... So he stuttered around for awhile and I said, "Well ... how are you attempting to use the knowledge that you've got in this? You're pretty advanced then." I was kinda sorry afterwards that I asked that. I kind of put him on the spot before the kids, and I don't think it was fair.... (He answered) in kind of a lame way. That's what made me sorry ... I apologized afterwards.

One girl commented on Jeremiah's remarks the following week. Jeremiah said:

One girl ... said, "Ever since Jeremiah spoke up the other night, I kept thinking about my own experience and what I'm going to do with this. I'm going to take this a lot more serious. I'm going to watch ... the paper, see what our governments doing, and everything."

Although Jeremiah believes that professors should "train" students so that "they're equipped to face society as responsible citizens when they finish their diploma," he is not sure of his own role now in that regard. He said, "Maybe I'm too far along in life to do

much about it because I'm not in Politics, I'm not in Sociology, none of those things, probably won't enter them you see." Jeremiah would enjoy having an opportunity for meaningful discussions with younger people but he is "not sure where to find them."

Jeremiah thinks that some professors get caught up in arguing about details and wonders how that contributes to the good of society. He said:

Now there's argument back and forth amongst these ... biblical scholars, and they're writing books back and forth and I might agree with you this year, but next year I got some other ideas.... What ... good does that do for society? What good does that do to the churches?... I couldn't get involved memorizing what they're trying to say because three years from now they'll write a different book that doesn't support the principles or the things at least they got in the first book. So their kind of interpretation of the bible never gets to the churches, never gets to the masses. It's just hung up in a little elite class by themselves and they're having a good time doing that, but I don't see where they're really contributing to anything.

Jeremiah felt that this was "a waste" for his own learning. He said:

I don't mean that everything they said (was a waste) because I benefited quite well from going there. I learned the chronology of the Old Testament and all the patriarchs and all the important people which I didn't have before.... So I'm very glad I went. I wouldn't give that up for anything.

Jeremiah believes that professors do not have "much ingenuity." He said:

I say if they lost their jobs they'd be employed in the lowest jobs in the university, in the city here. I don't ... think they could go out and be qualified to pick up a

good responsible position ... because they've never used their imagination. They've never used their resources. They've never wondered about if this could be improved or that could be improved.... They got a little niche there at the university and they feel quite secure. Now supposing there's some rule came in that they could no longer teach. Where would they go? If they didn't use the money that they earned so far and use it wisely ... they'd end up on welfare. Even the fellow that's teaching business, I don't think they'd be resourceful enough to go out and start a business of their own. Now some of them would. You can't put everybody in the same category. I'm generalizing here, but I would say, in my mind, the majority of all the professors would end up in that category.

Asking Questions

Jeremiah believes firmly that curiosity is essential for learning. He is concerned that students in university do not have enough curiosity. He said, "I mean they seem to accept things like, you know, he's good and he's been teaching here a long time and he looks prosperous. I think corporations notice the same thing when they go to work for them." Jeremiah is critical of both professors and students for not raising questions. He said, "We got far too many answers and not enough questions." Jeremiah believes that "it's more important to have a good question than it is to have the answer." He said, "If you don't formulate your question right, you'll never have the right answer. Now just having the right question doesn't mean you got the answer either but maybe in time you will."

Jeremiah believes that it is the responsibility of professors to arouse students'

curiosity. He said, "I mean if the professors would and the teachers would arouse this curiosity in the students' minds. It's got to start there rather than with the students themselves. They've gotta be asking these kind of questions, create this curiosity." To do this, professors must have more inquisitive minds themselves. Jeremiah said, "They got to be asking themselves more questions.... Now that's a fault in anybody. I don't care whether we went to school or didn't go to school. If we don't question ourselves often enough, it's a fault in us." Jeremiah suggested that professors "could go back and just study Aristotle and Socrates and those people. Use that kind of approach."

Jeremiah is concerned that professors have preconceived ideas as to how questions ought to be answered. Jeremiah said:

I think some of them think you shouldn't have an independent thought of your own, you know, and that all the knowledge is tied up in something they gave out and if you're going to become educated then that's what you have to accept.

Jeremiah was "bothered" by one teaching assistant in particular and said:

He was quite stuck in his way of how you should answer a question. He had his little framework all worked out there. If your answer didn't fit into that why he didn't give you much credit for it. He didn't give you much room for putting your own interpretation on things.

Besides being able to raise questions, Jeremiah believes that students must be able to express themselves clearly both speaking and writing. He thinks that the only subjects that provide opportunities for both raising questions and learning how to express oneself are Philosophy and English. Jeremiah said, "When you raise questions you got to be real

clear. You got to think of things too pretty clearly in order to question something.” He believes that all students should be required to take these subjects every year. Jeremiah said:

If I had a big corporation and I was looking ... to bring some younger people in and train them to take over the management of the thing after I were through, I would not go to the Business Administration department. I’d go to look for students that specialized in Philosophy and English where they ... can express themselves properly and where their mind is curious.... In Philosophy, you’re not taught to just accept things out there.

Study Habits - Learning Strategies

Jeremiah believes that his memory is not as good as it was when he was in the Air Force when he relied on his memory to pass exams. He said:

Now after the lecture I come home and go over my notes so I try to understand what he is saying there and then I come over and try to get it implanted in my mind pretty good. But I shouldn’t ... let too many days go by before I go over it again. If I let too much time go, I might forget what I learned there.

Self-Evaluation

Jeremiah believes that he was “handicapped in a lot of ways” because his “schooling was so fragmented.” He said:

I noticed it particularly in English in writing and expressing myself. You’d learn

something and then you'd get out of school and you'd be working in some kind of job that maybe the people weren't literate, you know, and sometimes you have a tendency to not pick up beyond that until you go back again. So I think, in that sense, it was a handicap.... (In university, I was) probably average. I would say that my grades averaged out to B, B+ somewhere like that. I got some A's but then I got some C's too.

Jeremiah is "very pleased" with his progress in his financial management course. He said, "It's kind of a rehash of old things ... but they got formulas and things like that they can scrutinize more clearly than they could when I went through the first time."

Since Jeremiah is not trying to finish a degree and is taking courses for interest he is not concerned with the marks that he gets. He said, "That's what I like about going to school now. I don't even worry about the exam. I go in for a special purpose of trying ... to get the answers to some questions that I raise in my mind." Although Jeremiah is not focusing on grades, his marks are about the same now as when he was doing his history degree. He said, "Maybe I was just doing average on all the questions before. Now I do a little better on some questions and worse on others, but they average out."

How to Enhance Jeremiah's Learning

Jeremiah believes that all students' learning, including his own, would be enhanced if professors used a questioning approach to encourage them to critically evaluate historical events. He said:

I think they could question whether it was the right thing to do at that time and ...

why we thought it was or what else they could have done that might have turned differently when years later it proved that that wasn't very good angle. And I don't think that they connect it enough with how it affects us today.

Jeremiah thinks that an impediment to his learning occurs when professors do not make connections between historical events and present day affairs. He said:

They don't prevent you from connecting it up yourself but no way do they encourage it or get the students to see that there's a connection that the way we think and act and the freedom we enjoy now started back then and progressed along various lines or maybe was obstructed.

Purpose of University

Jeremiah is going to university for both philosophical and practical reasons: to search for meaning in his life and to prepare himself to assist young people in developing business plans. He thinks that it is a mistake for people to stop going to university at all. It is very important for society if it is going to grow that people keep on learning so that they can contribute.

Benefits of Going to University

Jeremiah has found that going to university is a means of personal satisfaction, his search for the meaning of life. He said:

I wouldn't want to live the rest of my life out with a blank mind. I really wouldn't.

I'm well off physically but that by itself isn't enough. I realize the importance of

that and I go down to the gym four or five times a week. But I got to exercise my mind as well because if I thought it was just a matter of exercising my body I'd just leave die tomorrow as not because ... the future wouldn't hold any interest to me.

Future Plans

Jeremiah is planning to continue taking courses that interest him. Next semester he is taking a course on Reasoning and Rhetoric. Also, he plans to continue helping young people research the viability of starting a business and develop business plans. He said:

I rather enjoy the work I'm doing right now and I do it for free. And I think I can help a person in that respect and I find that real interesting. I would be willing to do it for nothing because I'm going to get along anyway.

My Reflections

Jeremiah has gone to great lengths to obtain an education throughout his life. He has been very determined and resourceful in doing this. Jeremiah accepts his life circumstances without complaint and just gets on with what he has to do.

Jeremiah has had a deep curiosity about life and learning throughout his life. He said that when he was young he could have made good money in a "labouring job" but he "wanted a broader understanding of what the world was about." Jeremiah's search for meaning may be related to his experiences as a native Indian in receiving differential treatment as he did when attending high school.

Jeremiah is very self-directed in his learning. He takes courses out of interest and is

not worried about grades. He has his own agenda for learning and refuses to learn something simply because the professor suggests it.

Jeremiah emphasizes the importance of questioning and discussion for learning throughout the case and criticizes professors and universities for not fostering these. An ideal class for him would be a discussion group where questions are valued and encouraged. Also, he values experiential learning (using computers) and learning from other students (the girls who helped him in computer science).

Jeremiah criticizes professors in general for their teaching practices. However, he does not blame individual professors or hold them responsible in any way because they were “trained to think that way.” He is very forgiving.

Both memorization and critical thinking are important for learning from Jeremiah’s perspective. When he studies, Jeremiah reads things over several times to get things “imbedded” in his mind. However, throughout the case he emphasizes the importance of critical thinking skills.

Jeremiah thinks that the purpose of university is to prepare students to be “responsible citizens.” There are two components to this: training students for the workplace “to go on with their life and make a place for themselves” and preparing people to take social action “to try to make things better.” Jeremiah sees no conflict between the two.

Summary

In this chapter I have introduced you to the participants of my study. They have shared their thoughts, feelings, and experiences about several aspects of the attending university. All participants felt that it was a privilege and honour to be going to university. They are enjoying the experience and relish the challenge. Four major themes emerged from the data. These themes are life experiences as lost opportunities for enhancing learning, professors as figures of authority, teaching practices: the agony and the ecstasy, and learning: the pathway to self-fulfillment. They are discussed in detail in the next chapter. I end this chapter with a poem written by one of the participants.

Knowledge

My search spirals to lofty skies
 Where mystic secrets, knowledge, lies.
 Piercing maze of clouds I found
 Answers, simple, clear, profound.
 Knowledge dwells not in distant skies
 Veiled, obscured, from searching eyes.
 It's here, there, everywhere,
 For you and I to seek and share.
 But to capture its tomorrow, and yesteryears
 Pursued it must be with toil and tears.

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CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETATIONS

The purpose of this study was to describe how older adults experience learning while taking degree courses at university. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine older adults once a week over a three week period. Participants' stories were presented in the preceding chapter. In this chapter I describe first the theoretical framework I use to discuss the major themes that emerged from the data. Then I discuss participants' experiences in light of the major themes. As noted in Chapter Three, themes were developed first by doing a content analysis of individual cases followed by a cross-case analysis. I relate the themes and relevant literature to the theoretical framework. Finally, I discuss implications for research and practice.

The theoretical framework used to discuss themes is that intellectual and cognitive growth centers on the accumulation of experience in dealing with concrete problems at work, in the home, and in community life (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). According to Tennant and Pogson, real-life problems are often poorly defined, may have several right answers, and contain limited, ambiguous or contradictory information. Resolving such problems requires new forms of thinking and reasoning beyond those required to solve abstract problems found on intelligence tests. These new forms of thinking and reasoning constitute intellectual and cognitive development in adulthood.

Understanding intellectual and cognitive development as growth recognizes that adults have the capacity to use their experiences to learn and develop throughout their lives. Adults change and develop in response to solving the concrete problems of everyday life. This development is context-dependant. Adults are influenced by their cultural

experiences and by the historical, social, and economic times in which they live. They grow and develop, cognitively and intellectually, within this context. This growth can continue on into old age.

I am using this framework because it has allowed me to look at older adults' learning from a broad perspective. Adults bring different beliefs, values, and perspectives to the learning setting depending on their life experiences. In studying participants' learning experiences, I have taken into consideration each person's life experiences and the notion that different forms of reasoning are required to solve life's problems. Consequently, I have gained an holistic understanding of their learning experiences that I could not have gained if I were to consider cognitive aging from a deficit perspective in which the focus would have been on exploring methods that might reverse or improve presumed cognitive deficits. Typically such research focuses on recall and recognition outcome variables and does not take life experiences into account. Using the framework of cognitive and intellectual development as a growth phenomenon, I can make recommendations for both research and teaching that focus on life experiences and build on the strengths of older adults rather than emphasizing their weaknesses.

Themes Emerging From Participants' Experiences of Learning

I developed four major themes from the data: life experiences as lost opportunities for enhancing learning, professors as figures of authority, teaching practices: the agony and the ecstasy, and learning: the pathway to self-fulfillment.

Life Experiences as Lost Opportunities for Enhancing Learning

The model of intellectual and cognitive development suggests that participants would use their past experiences as a basis for new learning. If past experience is the foundation for intellectual and cognitive growth such that adults refer to their past experiences when solving life's problems, then adults may be expected to refer to their past experience when they encounter new learning opportunities. Consequently, it would be important for teachers to make connections between the life experiences of these older adults and the course content. In general, participants' life experiences were not recognized or acknowledged by their teachers. Participants recognized the importance of life experiences in their learning intuitively. Each one articulated a connection between their life experiences and present learning in some way.

Andrew thought his war experiences were quite relevant in his history class where World War II was the focus. He felt he had a lot to contribute and was taken aback when he lost marks in one of his papers because he referred to an event not mentioned in the references provided. When Andrew questioned his marks, he reported the teaching assistant as saying, "That's all well and good but we wanted you to stick to the reference material and I don't think that was covered." Andrew resented his experiences being rejected and downplayed how he felt about it when he said, "not a big deal, mildly resentful, but I didn't press the point." In this instance, the teaching assistant missed an opportunity to help Andrew explore his experiences in relation to the course content and, perhaps, arrive at a new understanding of his experiences. Andrew is trying to paint a "global picture" of the war in order to make sense out of his own war experiences and

could have benefited from such a discussion.

Andrea was interested in the political aspect of history because the depression and the second world war had a profound influence on her life. She said, “Ultimately for me, to get the political history straight in my mind is ... the sort of bedrock.” Consequently, when Andrea wrote history papers she tended to downplay the social and economic perspectives which are “fashionable in history nowadays” in favour of the political perspective. In doing so she lost marks. Essentially, Andrea’s interests in history differ from those of the professor and she has pursued her own interests in writing papers. Rather than suggesting that Andrea play down the political aspect of history, the teaching assistant might have explored with her the interplay between the political, economical, and social issues of historical events helping her to reach deeper insights. He missed an opportunity to enhance Andrea’s learning.

Jeremiah has questions on the origin of our values and customs and is searching for answers through the study of History and Philosophy. He is perturbed that professors do not consider his life experiences as relevant in the classroom. Of one professor he said, “I don’t think he thought of me any differently than these kids coming out of high school. I mean he never inquired about whether I had any other thoughts other than what we went over, what he brought into the class.” Jeremiah is trying to connect his knowledge and past experience to the course content of his history classes and understand historical events within the larger context of the world today. He is frustrated when his professors don’t make this connection.

Ted is studying Philosophy and is having great difficulty in reconciling his beliefs

and values with what he is learning. He is uneasy about the conflict between his beliefs and the ideas being taught because, as he said, "It was 500 BC that they've been thinking about all this stuff up till now.... So there must be some truth in what they're saying. Otherwise how could it last so long?" Ted cannot erase his past experiences in order to learn something new. However, Ted's professor could be stimulating him to reflect on his beliefs, values, and life experiences and, perhaps, change his perspectives. Although the professor must recognize that Ted is not doing well in the course, the professor will never know the source of Ted's difficulties because Ted will not consult him. He has found professors extremely difficult to approach. If the professor had met personally with Ted and learned about his difficulties, he might have been able to help Ted through this impasse.

As expected within the framework of intellectual and cognitive development as a growth phenomenon, these participants are using their past experiences to make sense of their current learning. It is well recognized in the field of adult education that past experience is the foundation on which adults build new learning. For renowned writers such as Dewey (1963), Knowles (1978), Brookfield (1987), and Mezirow (1991), the concept that past experience is both a resource and frame of reference for new learning has been a central theme in developing their theories on adult education. Nevertheless, as Tennant and Pogson (1995) have said, education must stimulate the learner to go beyond their experiences, that their experiences must be mediated and reconstructed for learning to occur. Unfortunately, universities tend not to be responsive to this need. They are geared to young adults with limited life experiences who are learning how to think

according to academic criteria in which, according to Tennant and Pogson (1995), concepts are analyzed in terms of their conceptual clarity, internal consistency, and fit with experimental observation. This type of analysis does not require reflecting on past experience. Andrea echoed this perspective when, in pointing out the difference between young and older students, she said that past experience is not needed for the “gymnastic approach” to analyzing historical events. Of course, learning to analyze concepts according to academic criteria is extremely important for young students but it is not sufficient for older adult learners. For them, past experience is the focal point for analysis, and from this perspective, universities may fail older adult learners.

These anecdotes from the experiences of Andrew, Andrea, Jeremiah, and Ted are examples of how participants’ past experiences have been ignored in the classroom. These examples represent lost opportunities for both students and professors. The personal learning objectives of Andrew, Andrea, Jeremiah, and Ted were thwarted. The professors lost opportunities to enrich their teaching and their classes by connecting the theory and research of their knowledge domains to the very concrete personal life experiences of these older students.

Professors as Figures of Authority

The model of intellectual and cognitive development as a growth phenomenon suggests that participants are likely to perceive their professors on the basis of their past educational experiences. If past experience is the basis for intellectual and cognitive growth, then it may be expected that adult learners will refer to their past experiences to

understand the context of a novel situation, in this instance, the university experience. They may perceive their professors in much the same way that they perceived their teachers during their early education. Participants viewed professors as authority figures. This is evident in the way that they talked about their professors, in their expectations to feed back what they thought professors wanted, their reactions to grading, and in their refusal to criticize professors to any extent even though they resented what they considered to be poor teaching practices.

Power differentials are expressed in language. That participants viewed their professors as authority figures is evident in how participants talked about their professors. Ted felt he could not approach his professors. He made such statements as, "Some of them live in an ivory tower," and "they're not reachable." In explaining her inability to ask questions in class, Maureen said, "You can speak more openly to a TA than you can to a professor ... someone more on our level." Andrew demonstrated how intimidated he was by the status of professors when he said, "The names of some of the professors are frightening enough because they got lists of degrees after their names that long." Even David, who had been a college professor at one time, indicated a sense of professor as authority when he made such statements as, "most students dare to do it (ask questions)," and "we have no break during the morning class because the professor has recommended it." These examples show clearly that participants saw professors as authority figures. As a result, they were reluctant to approach professors with questions or concerns.

Because participants viewed professors as authority figures they felt that they must feed back to professors what they thought professors wanted to hear. Andrea realized that

she was expected to learn about topics in history that interested the professor and then “turn around and use that material when exam time comes to feed it back in correct format.” Andrea was quite pragmatic about this and considered it the norm. Maureen recognized that the key to success in writing tests and papers was to provide the professor with what he wanted. She said, “You have to learn what they want. Every professor has his or her own way of doing things, and they want you to write the way they want you to write.” Maureen couldn’t see the purpose in this since she suspected that her professors did not read student papers. She said:

Ours in history, the day after the exam, he went to spend the summer in Italy. So I don't think he looked at any of our exams.... So I just wondered why this was so when you read that you always write ... what the professor wants ... something to show him that you have been listening to him.

Fred believed that he had to adapt to the teaching style of the professor even when it meant enduring six hours of lecture. He said, “I have to accept the instructor or professor who is there, and I have to adapt to his style, and I got to do what this person wants in order to get my mark and get the heck out of there.” Fred saw this as a “nuisance” but something he had to tolerate. Andrew summed up what participants thought about feeding back to professors what they thought they wanted to hear when he said, “There is no point in trying to buck the system and this is what they want. And this is what you should give them, so, pretty good reason.”

Of course, students must fulfill course requirements, but in doing so, there ought to be room for pursuing one’s interests and developing one’s own ideas. Participants had

their own learning goals. They had ideas derived from their life experiences that they were interested in pursuing. They were thwarted by the absolute requirement to meet the professors' expectations. Participants resented having their ideas and interests being ignored or rejected. Yet they were very reluctant to complain. They recognized professors as figures of authority who awarded marks for compliance to their expectations.

Participants' reactions to grading is another example that participants viewed professors as figures of authority. Participants held little hope that their marks might be changed even though there was justification for doing so. Maureen complained about her grade on an anthropology test. Because two words in an answer were illegible, she had received no marks for it. The teaching assistant refused to adjust her mark when she explained what the words were. Maureen said, "He has his orders from the professor." Maureen was very upset and angry about how she was treated. She has arthritis in her hands and when she works under pressure or writes for an extended period of time her hand tightens up and it is hard to write. Maureen has decided not to complain again because she "doesn't want to make waves" or "get the name of an agitator." Jessica was "shocked" and "devastated" when she received zero on an assignment in a skills research course. When Jessica showed the professor the paper work that she had done in preparing the assignment, the professor admitted that if she had realized she had done that much work she might have given her different mark. Yet the professor refused to change Jessica's mark. Jessica said, "Maybe I'm not being fair, but I found her deliberately intimidating." Eventually she withdrew from the course because she could see no hope in changing the professor's opinion of her abilities. Jessica did not want to receive a failing

grade. Granted, there must be good reasons for changing a grade. However, assigning marks is never so objective and accurate that there can never be a reason for not adjusting them. Both Jessica and Maureen felt helpless. They believed that marks assigned by their professors could not be disputed. Their professors were the authority.

The fact that participants were extremely reluctant to criticize professors or their teaching practices is another indication that they viewed professors as figures of authority. Throughout the interviews participants would start to voice concerns about professors and their teaching practices. However, when I questioned participants further, they would quickly retreat from making criticisms. When Jessica was given a zero on an assignment in a research skills course, she was “embarrassed, shocked, and disappointed.” Yet Jessica refused to criticize the teacher and excused her by saying, “I guess ... being a librarian is not an easy job.” In Statistics, Fred attended six hours of classes back to back and did not complain even though it was very tiring for him. He said, “I am very realistic and I say, ‘Ok, that’s what I have to do, so that’s what I do.’ And then it’s ok.” In fact, he praised the professor when he said, “He is really, really ... putting an effort. I don’t think he could do anymore, no way.” Maureen, who has a severe hearing problem, described professors who talked so fast she could not keep up with her notes (which she took in shorthand!), a professor who gave information one day that appeared on a test the next day, and another who apparently didn’t read essays or exams. Yet, she was not critical of any of these practices. David has clear ideas of what he considers good teaching. He criticized the teaching practices of one professor in Calculus for “writing on the board from the first minute he started to the last minute we were supposed to leave the classroom.” Yet he

excused him because he was “sort of act(ing) very responsibly in a way by not depriving the students of any ramifications of the theory.” Clearly, participants had legitimate concerns about teaching practices. Yet they were very reluctant to criticize their professors. These findings are quite similar to those of Johnson (1989). Her participants had no criticisms at all to make about instructors, curriculum, or teaching practices.

Tennant and Pogson (1995) discussed three dimensions in the adult teacher-student relationship: political, philosophical, and psychological. These dimensions provide insight into why participants felt as they did. The political dimension speaks to how power is distributed between the teacher and learners and among learners. The philosophical dimension has to do with how the relationship between teacher and students serves the purpose of the educational activity. The psychological dimension focuses on attitudes, expectations, and actions of teachers and learners toward each other (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). These dimensions were quite evident in participants’ intuitive understanding of the adult student-teacher relationship.

In terms of the political dimension, how power is distributed, most participants saw their professors as holding all the power. Richard, a doctoral student, talked directly of power. He wanted a voice in how his consulting class was run. In one instance, Richard was annoyed when the professor brought in a substitute teacher without consulting students. As a result, he walked out in the middle of the class. Richard believes that the power relationship between adult student and teacher ought to be based on expert knowledge. He said, “On one level I think of the professors ... as peers. Societally we are peers. Intellectually we may be peers. However they come with a body of knowledge that

I want...to access.” Another example of power in the teacher-student relationship is the assignment of grades. Knowles (1980) and Cranton (1994) discussed the disempowering effect of grades on adult learners. The experiences of Jessica and Maureen related earlier are good examples. In an ideal adult student-teacher relationship, power is distributed more evenly between and amongst teacher and students. Participants, as autonomous, responsible older adults, resented the way power was held solely by the professor even though they expected it.

With regard to the philosophical dimension, how the teacher-student relationship suits the purposes of the educational activity, Jeremiah’s experiences in history classes provide a good example. For Jeremiah, there is a tension between professors being authority figures and the aims of education. Jeremiah believes that the purpose of education is to prepare students for the workplace and to be responsible citizens. To accomplish these aims, professors must stimulate curiosity in students and encourage them to ask questions and think critically. Jeremiah is very critical of professors in this regard. He said, “I think the whole university has too many answers and not enough questions.” The current practice of lecturing does not provide students with an environment that encourages asking questions and thinking critically. Lectures are an authority-focused teaching method which reinforces the perception of professor as a figure of authority. Jeremiah envisioned discussion groups where students could study history from a critical perspective. He said:

I think they could question whether it was the right thing to do at that time and ... why we thought it was or what else they could have done that might have turned

differently when years later it proved that that wasn't very good angle. And I don't think that they connect it enough with how it affects us today.

Jeremiah is interested in analyzing ideas and knowledge in terms of his accumulated life experiences and what meaning it has for society today. He is frustrated that the learning environment does not support this kind of analysis. He would prefer a more egalitarian teacher-student relationship that supports and encourages questioning and critical thinking, one in which professors are knowledge experts rather than figures of authority. Such a relationship would promote what Jeremiah understands as the purpose of education, preparing students for the workplace and for being responsible citizens.

In terms of the psychological dimension, how teacher and students relate to each other in terms of their attitudes, expectations, and actions, some participants needed a more personable relationship with their professors. Relationships are very important to both Ted and Jessica. Ted is very uncomfortable with his professors and is perplexed by his feelings. He said:

I'm older and maturer, etc. I still have this... teacher-student barrier, it's always there.... You always think that they're not reachable. I don't know why I have that feeling. Here I'm an adult. I'm mature. I'm not a boy. You should be able to get quickly into a good relationship with your profs, communicate.

Both Ted and Jessica rated good teachers as those who went out of their way to meet students and took a personal interest in them. Jessica praised one professor, "She was superb... She encouraged dialogue.... She established a real enthusiasm and real rapport with the students. She was very personally interested in the students." She criticized

another professor for being “terribly reserved.” Jessica found this “a little difficult.” She said, “I didn’t find her style very easy or encouraging.” One English teacher was able to overcome the student-teacher barrier with Ted. He praised her and said:

I think that she was very good because ... she made appointment(s) to see all of the students... So we had to go and see her. There was no way out, and then that kind of broke the small barrier.... So I have no problem with her.

The kind of relationship that Jessica and Ted establish with their professors affects their learning experiences. Jessica learns best “when professors offer her encouragement,” that is, take a personal interest in her progress. With the exception of the one English professor, Ted is unable to approach professors with questions. As a consequence, difficult concepts in Philosophy remain a mystery to him. For Jessica and Ted, the psychological dimension of the student-teacher relationship is an important element for successful learning experiences.

Viewing professors as figures of authority fits within the framework of intellectual and cognitive development as a growth phenomenon. These participants grew up in an era in which, as Bolton (1990) stated, all professionals, including teachers, were perceived as authority figures and were not to be questioned. These participants expected to be powerless in the classroom. Yet, they were quite uncomfortable with having no power. After all, they are empowered in the rest of their lives. Participants have been making responsible decisions in their work, family, and community lives for many years. This paradox has created a tension for participants between the expectation of being powerless in the university classroom and the experience of being empowered in other aspects of

their lives. It can explain participants' resentment of some of their experiences in the university classroom and yet their reluctance to criticize them because of their perception that professors are figures of authority. Participants' reluctance to criticize is the primary difference between these findings and those of Cleave-Hogg (1996). Her participants, the majority of whom were 30 to 50 years of age seemed much more vocal in their criticisms of the authoritarian stance of their professors and did not make excuses for them. They grew up in an era in which authoritarian teaching practices were not the norm and were far less tolerant of such practices.

Interestingly, three participants who had attended university earlier in life did not appear to hold professors in such awe. They seemed to expect a more egalitarian environment where less authority is invested in the professor. They criticized freely what they saw as poor teaching practices. However, two of these three participants made excuses for professors' practices. Even they were reluctant to complain. These findings fit within the framework of intellectual and cognitive development as a growth phenomenon. The extent to which participants viewed professors as figures of authority was based on their past experiences. Those with previous university education expected a more learner-focused classroom environment and were more likely to voice their criticisms when this did not happen.

Teaching Practices: The Agony and the Ecstasy

The model of intellectual and cognitive development as a growth phenomenon suggests that older adults would prefer teaching practices that provide opportunities for

discussion where new ideas and knowledge can be examined within the context of life experiences. If past experience is the foundation of intellectual and cognitive growth, then adult learners may be expected to prefer teaching practices that support opportunities for reflecting on and discussing their past experiences in order to make meaning out of what they are learning. All participants preferred small classes where there were opportunities for discussion and asking questions. They enjoyed experiential teaching methods where they had an opportunity to participate actively. As well, they preferred writing papers rather than exams. In writing papers they had an opportunity to research and analyze a topic while drawing on their life experiences.

Although sometimes lectures were described as interesting, especially if the professor had a sense of humour, participants did not believe that they were good learning experiences. Many of their professors tried to cover too much material, spoke too quickly, and allowed too few breaks. As a result, participants considered lectures very onerous.

Andrew said:

I am writing to try to capture the highlight of what the person is saying.... By the time I get down the point that he has just made, he's into the next point and my mind is trying to get up to speed to understand the next point and the next point and the next point. So I find by the end of the lecture I am physically drained.

Twice a week, Fred endured six hours of Statistics, a three-hour lecture, a two-hour workshop that ended up being a lecture, and a one-hour tutorial, one right after another.

Fred said:

So you got to pull myself together and it is a long haul and you better prepare

yourself for it. You better eat enough before, and don't drink too much that you have to go out. All this goes in my head and then I can face it better.

Besides being very taxing, participants believed that they learned very little from lectures. Maureen, who takes notes in shorthand, said, "In the lecture you take down as much as you can as fast as you can. So what you're learning from the lecture is what you learn as you read over your notes. Right then you can't absorb what's being said." Richard would prefer to do independent reading rather than attend lectures. He said, "I do not need somebody standing in front of me and talking at me for three hours. I guess that would be interesting but ... I could do that myself at home with a book. It's the same experience." Jeremiah is very concerned that lectures do not foster inquisitiveness and critical thinking skills. He said:

In a lecture you just sit there in a passive person and they're throwing this stuff at you and you're supposed to absorb it and throw it back ... and in the meantime you haven't learned to use your own mind.... I don't think you can educate a person just like that. And really if you want top marks all you got to have is a good memory.

Lectures did not allow participants to interact with the material in a meaningful way.

Anything participants learned about the course content occurred later through independent study.

On the other hand, participants found small classes such as tutorials and seminars good learning experiences. In these classes they had opportunities for discussion and asking questions. Andrea can draw on her life experiences in tutorials." She said, "I prefer

tutorials because I'm fairly articulate, you see. So ... this is where the fact that I've got a more extensive background means I can very often jump in with an idea, you see." Jessica likes the interaction with other students that a small class offers. She said, "Tutorials are a good learning experience because you're learning in small groups. You're participating. You're contributing. You're learning from other students. I've found tutorials extremely helpful." Maureen believes that tutorials are a big asset because less information is covered and there is "lively" discussion. She commented, "In the tutorial we break things down and ... it doesn't go at such a pace because we don't cover all the points.... I find I learn a lot from the tutorial." Ted has difficulty asking questions of professors and prefers to get his questions answered by teaching assistants with whom he feels much more comfortable. He said, "They are just passed their studenthood. They know exactly what is troubling us or what is difficult for us. We are talking on the same level." So Ted saves his questions for the tutorial. In graduate school, Richard's classes are small and professors provide opportunities for lots of discussion. He said, "I have learned most from the people who have allowed me to freely exchange views with other people, to examine on my own what other people think." Participants preferred small classes where they could discuss course topics with others, share ideas, and ask questions.

Classes that participants appreciated very much and remembered clearly were those in which experiential teaching practices were used. Fred was enthusiastic about his German and French classes where his professors used interactive, innovative techniques. Both professors engaged students in activities based on concrete life experiences that required them to use the target language. Fred commented on the German class, "I liked

his methods.... I found it more interesting the way he did it because you could use it and then he involved people in talking and everybody had to ... talk in German.” Normally, Fred has great difficulty in speaking in class. However, in the above situation, he participated actively and enjoyed it. In his course on consulting skills, Richard had the opportunity to practise consulting through role play. He said:

We break up into triads, quartets and it’s really interesting.... The purpose of that is to consult with each other.... One of us is a client. One of us is a consultant. One of us is an observer. We each have an area that we want help with.

This process has been extremely helpful for Richard. He received feedback that surprised and shocked him, but which he has taken to heart and acted upon. Jessica took a women’s studies course in which there was a practicum. She chose to work in a women’s shelter. She said, “So once a week, I went to the women’s shelter and looked after the playroom.... A lot of the mothers were out through the day working or looking for a place to live.” This experience raised Jessica’s awareness of the plight of abused women to the extent that she became involved in a housing project for abused women. Courses that used teaching practices that engaged participants actively were considered very positive learning experiences, and in several cases, had a significant impact on their lives.

When it came to evaluation of what participants had learned in their courses, they preferred to write papers rather than tests and exams. Participants felt that exams were not a true reflection of their learning. Andrea said, “I’ve never found it difficult to learn but I do find it hard to give back the information in an exam.” Maureen’s exams have consisted of essay questions requiring lengthy answers. On one exam her hand cramped up so badly

that she was unable to write legibly and thus lost marks. Maureen said, "I wrote too much on the first essay.... By the time I got to the last essay ... my hand just wouldn't work.... I'm sure it was hard to read, but my hand just gave up on me." Jessica is very nervous when she writes exams. On an exam in Classical Mythology she "sat numb." Jessica said, "I couldn't answer. I think I answered maybe one question. I could not think of the material at all. It just left me." Fred suffers from severe anxiety when he writes exams. He said:

I don't have any problem with understanding ... but when it comes to tests, I have problems to taking tests, and then I have problem to reproduce it.... I need a lot more time than the test gives me.... There are lots of times after the test is done, that I knew that I should have known that. Why didn't I know that at that time?

Both Ted and Maureen are concerned about writing something that might be construed as "foolish" on exams. Maureen wondered about including some of the themes her professor in English Literature identified in a story on an exam. She said, "I don't know whether ... I should write them down if I'm asked them on the exam because to me it sounds foolish, but he doesn't think whatever he says is foolish." Ted was so embarrassed and discouraged by what he wrote on an English literature exam that he contemplated dropping the course. He said:

I wrote so much nonsense. You know how it is when you get desperate. You fill it in? Then when I left, I knew, oh it was terrible in my mind.... In fact, I thought, it was so embarrassing the way I wrote it, so I was so discouraged.

Writing exams did not provide participants with the opportunity to demonstrate what they

had learned. For reasons such as fatigue, anxiety over the prospect of performing poorly, and fear of appearing foolish, these participants were not able to perform as they would have liked.

Participants preferred writing papers where they had an opportunity to explore and analyze a subject drawing on their accumulated life experiences. Since writing was integral to his work in the advertising field, Richard prefers to be evaluated by writing papers. He said:

If I had to take exams I'd be cooked ... because I don't have a great memory....

But writing papers where I can plan and formulate ... has proved to be advantageous to me. It is appropriate for the way I learn and for the way I express myself and for the way I use information.

Fred gets a thrill out of doing a "nice beautiful essay" and feels accepted when he receives a good mark. He said, "I put lots of thought in it, lots of maybe even emotions or convictions and that. Then ... if it comes out good, then, oh well, it's approved sort of, what I thought, my views and whatever." Writing papers has helped Maureen improve her analytical skills. She said, "I included a lot of them (author's opinions) as quotes, but I also added what I thought which is you have to present an argument either for or against." Maureen gained a new perspective on the status of women when she wrote an essay about a particular group of women in Africa who experienced the breakup of their matrilineal society which caused them to lose status. She related this event to her own experiences. She said, "I think of my mother. She would (have) love(d) to have had the opportunity to go out into the world and work and she always felt ... what she did wasn't worth

anything.” Writing papers provided these participants with opportunities to hone their analytical skills, integrate what they were learning with their past experiences, and develop new perspectives as well as demonstrate what they had learned to their professors.

The model of intellectual and cognitive development as a growth phenomenon can explain participants experiences with teaching practices. Mezirow (1991) stated that making meaning out of life experiences is central to adult learning. For adults, past experiences are the foundation on which new learning takes place. Learning from experience requires reflection (Boud et al., 1985b; Boyd & Fales, 1983; Brookfield, 1990b; Mezirow, 1991). Listening to lectures does not allow participants time to reflect, to link the material to their own life experiences and make personal meaning out of it. Tutorials, on the other hand, provide an opportunity for participants to exchange ideas, share experiences, ask questions, reflect on what has been heard, and make meaning out of the course content. Similarly for exams, participants cannot relate the examination questions to their own life experiences in a meaningful way. Whereas writing essays allows participants an opportunity to examine and analyze knowledge and ideas in the light of their own life experiences, reflect on what they have read, and create their own personal meaning out of the material.

The importance of the relationship between learning, past experiences, and teaching practices is evident in the way participants talked about teaching practices. When participants discussed attending lectures and writing exams, their attention was focused on the physical hardships encountered. Both practices were considered tests of endurance with little relation to learning. However, when participants discussed attending tutorials

and writing papers, they would relate in detail and with enthusiasm what they had learned during the process. Participants knew intuitively the importance of life experiences in their learning and preferred those teaching practices that forged links between the two.

Learning: The Pathway to Self-fulfilment

The model of intellectual and cognitive development suggests that the reasons participants would give for attending university would be related to some perceived learning need arising from their life experiences. If past experience is the basis of intellectual and cognitive growth, then adults may be expected to seek learning opportunities when they recognize that new learning is required to resolve current problems or previously unresolved life issues. Also, they may decide to pursue educational programs related to interests that arise from their life experiences. Participants expressed various reasons for attending university, all connected to their life experiences. They talked about such things as going full circle, fulfilling a life long ambition, expanding their horizons, and stimulating their intellectual growth.

Maureen, Fred, and Ted are going to university because they were never able to complete their education when they were young. Maureen was not allowed to go to high school because “in (her) culture ... that wasn’t an important thing for a girl.” Maureen said, “Always at the back of my mind, always was a thought that someday, someday, I’m going to get my turn.” Fred quit school in Grade Nine following an incident with a teacher and has been trying to make up for it ever since. He said, “That was the biggest, biggest, biggest mistake I have ever made in my life. I have regretted it for ever and ever and ever

and ever.” Ted and his family were interned in British Columbia during World War II and he was forced to quit school. He said, “It was due to the war, I suppose, and then we were evacuated, and our education in a sense stopped.” By attending university now, Maureen, Fred, and Ted are fulfilling their lifelong ambition of finishing their education.

Jeremiah, Andrea, and Richard completed postsecondary degrees in their earlier years. They have a keen desire to keep on learning and are taking courses that are helping them to make meaning out of their life experiences. Jeremiah, who received a Bachelor of Commerce degree as a veteran of World War II, now studies History and Philosophy. He said, “I guess the reason I went back to study History in the first place was I was always curious about where we got our way of thinking, where we got our values and everything like that.” Andrea described getting a specialist’s degree in History as “going full circle.” Even though Andrea and her friends took different educational routes (Andrea went to art college while her friends went to university) all of them ended up in the same field, publishing. Andrea said, “It just seemed to be ... a neat thing to do. I was already there improving my French and then it just occurred (to me) that to get a degree was ... kind of a neat thing to tidy this up.” Richard, who obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree as a young man, began graduate studies in education when he sold his advertising business. He said, “I realized ... I wanted to start learning. I really ... felt quite flat and quite stale. I had the sense that I hadn’t a new thought for years.” For Jeremiah, Andrea, and Richard, university offers them an opportunity to keep on learning by pursuing topics that interest them and help them make meaning out of their life experiences.

At this particular time in their studies, Jeremiah and Richard are taking courses for

very practical reasons. Jeremiah is taking Business Management so that he can help young adults develop business cases for obtaining financing for new businesses. He said, “I think I can help a person in that respect, and ... I find that real interesting and I would be willing to do it for nothing because I’m going to get along anyway.” Richard has made a career in consulting but has never studied it either formally or informally. He said, “I have no idea why I do what I do, and I’m not sure what I do that’s good and what I do that’s bad. And this is a course that is telling me this.” In these instances, Jeremiah and Richard are applying what they are learning to their work-related roles.

Regardless of the reasons that brought participants to university, they regard the experience as one of personal development and fulfilment. Throughout our conversations Richard referred to learning as nourishment. He recognized this theme and said, “I use the word nourishment a lot because it applies so appropriately in my case anyway, for it’s a meal long deferred.” Fred views learning at university as “self-actualization” and intends to push himself to his “potential.” Even though he has found it very difficult to learn Statistics he believes that “it is still a rewarding and fulfilling experience to study at the university level in a chosen field.” Jeremiah believes that intellectual development is essential for remaining active and leading a healthy life. He said:

I wouldn’t want to live the rest of my life out with a blank mind. I really wouldn’t.... I got to exercise my mind ... because if I thought it was just a matter of exercising my body I’d just leave die tomorrow as not because ... the future wouldn’t hold any interest to me.

For Maureen, going to university has provided an opportunity for “changing your way of

thinking and changing the rut that you're in," and "uprooting all your comfortableness, all your set ways." Maureen described going to university as "walking down the path of personal growth." She believes that "the most outstanding thing" that she has learned is that she does not know enough. She said, "I want to learn more, and I have a need to learn, almost an urge to learn more." University studies have expanded participants' horizons and offered them an opportunity for further intellectual growth for which they are extremely pleased. They welcome the challenge.

Participants are proud of the gains that they have made. Andrew and Jessica have discovered that they have a better understanding of world events. Andrew said:

I feel that they (courses taken) have improved my intellect and I think they made me be able to converse more broadly on a greater range of subjects.... So I find that perhaps without my studies, I would have missed out on some very enjoyable exchanges with my friends.

Jessica commented:

Now I tend to look at political matters and even some scientific matters and art. So I think my interests have broadened in that way. And very often ... I'll hear something on the radio or I'll read something or I'll hear somebody refer to a topic and I can key into it. ... It has some meaning that I would never have understood before.... So that's really been a big plus, expanded my horizons.

Ted has discovered that studying English has helped him to improve in writing poetry. He said, "After I finished my English class, I thought, 'I learned a lot. So maybe I should just look at my poetry.' I changed it (a poem) and I could see a lot of definite improvement."

Participants have noticed positive changes in their intellectual development and attribute them to their university studies.

As expected within the framework of intellectual and cognitive development as a growth phenomenon, the reasons that participants give for attending university are related to their life experiences. Interestingly, for these older adults, their motives for learning are different from those typically ascribed to adult learners. The adult education literature emphasizes that adults seek learning opportunities to solve concrete problems and concerns connected with their life situations (see Brundage & Mackeracher, 1980; Cranton, 1989; Knowles, 1978) such as attaining new skills for work or enhancing career opportunities. Indeed, some participants did take courses that had an immediate practical value. However, for the most part, these older learners are pursuing much more intellectual goals related to personal development rather than to concrete practical concerns.

Studies of older learners' motives for learning have identified reasons such as satisfying needs and goals related to identity, affiliation, competence, and involvement in meaningful and purposeful activities (Adair & Mowesian, 1993), making meaning out of one's world (Courtenay & Truluck, 1997), intellectual growth and achievement of personal insight (Brady, 1983), and a quest for self-development and the wish to make meaning of human experience (Wolf, 1991). For the most part, the findings of such research are interpreted within life span theories of development. These theories emphasize that the developmental task of older adults is to integrate their experiences and achieve a sense of continuity and understanding of themselves and their world (Wolf,

1985b). The emphasis is on closure.

Interestingly, although the reasons participants gave for going to university are very similar to those cited in the literature, these older learners are not focused on closure but on future possibilities. They were future-oriented. Participants acknowledged the finiteness of life but did not dwell on it. They were intent on living their lives to the fullest and pursuing their dreams. If David is successful in writing a mathematical formula for his idea in Quantum Physics, he hopes to go on to graduate work. He said, "If I can mathematically relate even just two such constants this would automatically generate tremendous interest to be pursued further." Ted has dreams of going to teacher's college so that he can teach English as a Second Language to Chinese or Japanese people as a volunteer. He said, "The need for that is there.... That's why back of my mind is Cantonese idea is there. I'm learning Cantonese. And maybe Japanese.... It's kind of a dream, you know." When Jessica finishes her degree she intends to continue taking courses and hopes to convince her husband to go with her. She said, "There are lots of options. I could do postgraduate studies which I would enjoy. But there are lots of courses now that are open to seniors. They're noncredit.... Then there are the Elderhostels and that's another possibility." Besides finishing her degree, Maureen wants to continue her lessons on the saxophone so that she can play in senior's residences. She said, "I started (lessons) when I was almost retirement age.... I always wanted to play the saxophone. Isn't it crazy when people have a lot to do?" All participants looked forward to the future. They were intent on personal development. None were focused on bringing closure to their lives suggested by the life span literature as the developmental task of

older adults. Perhaps this focus on further personal development is some of the best evidence of all to support the model of intellectual and cognitive development as a growth phenomenon.

Summary

I have discussed four major themes that emerged from the data: life experiences as lost opportunities for enhancing learning, professors as figures of authority, teaching practices: the agony and the ecstasy, and learning: the pathway to self-fulfillment. I have interpreted these themes in terms of the model of intellectual and cognitive development as a growth phenomenon and related them to relevant literature. In the next chapter, I will offer conclusions and discuss what these findings might mean for research and practice.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to describe how older adults experience learning while taking degree courses at university. In-depth interviews were conducted with nine older adults over a three-week period. Four themes emerged from the data: life experiences as lost opportunities for enhancing learning, professors as figures of authority, teaching practices: the agony and the ecstasy, and learning: the pathway to self-fulfillment. These themes were interpreted in terms of the growth model of adult intellectual and cognitive development.

At the beginning of this thesis, I discussed three models of adult intellectual and cognitive development: the deficit, stability, and growth models. I chose to use the growth model to interpret the findings because it could explain all four themes. Before deciding to use the growth model I had considered how the deficit or stability model might explain the findings.

Underlying both the deficit and stability models of adult intellectual and cognitive development is the idea that there is a decrease in cognitive resources due to deterioration of the central nervous system as one ages. This deterioration results in a decrease in one's ability to process, recall, and use information. The difference between the two models is timing. The former suggests a gradual decrease in cognitive resources and the latter stability until later in life when the decrease is much more sudden. Participants in this study are of such an age that either model would predict a decrease in cognitive resources.

A decrease in cognitive resources might explain participants' reactions to teaching practices. Participants were under great pressure in both lectures and exams. They had

difficulty keeping up with the pace and described lectures and exams as onerous and stressful. On the other hand, participants preferred tutorials and writing papers. These practices allowed them time to discuss, think about, and analyze topics.

Mentally manipulating information is done in working memory (Baddely, 1986). Tasks that tap working memory necessitate simultaneous storage of recently presented material and processing of additional information (Hultsch & Dixon, 1990). Craik (1977) was one of the first to demonstrate that tasks tapping working memory showed age-related decrements when they required active manipulation of information or division of attention. Craik, Morris, and Gick (1989) and Salthouse (1988) have suggested that the older adult's difficulty lies primarily in the processing aspects of working memory rather than in the storage aspects. From this perspective, during lectures, these participants might not have had sufficient cognitive resources to attend to what the professor was saying and take down notes at the same time, especially if the professor spoke quickly. The same argument may be made for exams. Participants did not have sufficient cognitive resources to recall, think about, and write down appropriate responses to questions within the time limits prescribed.

There are two problems with the deficit and stability models as explanations for these findings. First, they do not take into account the myriad personal, social, psychological, and environmental factors that affect learning. As noted in the literature review, these models have been criticized for this reason. Second, the deficit and stability theories cannot explain the other three themes: life experiences as lost opportunities for enhancing learning, professors as figures of authority, or learning: the pathway to self-

fulfilment. Thus, they fall short as theoretical interpretations of the findings.

There is one other point that needs to be discussed for the sake of completion. The growth model of intellectual and cognitive development states that adults develop new forms of thinking and reasoning by solving problems related to work, home, and community life. Although exploring this concept was not a research question, it is evident from the findings that participants preferred teaching practices such as attending tutorials and writing papers that provided opportunities for critical thinking and reasoning. In fact, one participant was especially articulate in his criticism of professors and the university as a whole for placing too much emphasis on memorizing facts in order to recall them at exam time. He valued curiosity, questioning and critical thinking and felt these skills were not encouraged in university. Participants' preference for teaching practices that encourage questioning and critical thinking is further evidence in support of the growth model of intellectual and cognitive development.

Conclusions

Participants shared their thoughts and feelings about the total university experience. They were delighted to be attending university. Participants felt that it was an honour and a privilege to be there. Starting university was quite overwhelming and intimidating especially for those who had no previous experience of it. They were grateful for the assistance of the senior's program coordinator who helped them gain admission and register for courses. Participants took their studies seriously and worked hard. They were competent learners. With the exception of one person who had special status because

he had recently completed a degree, participants were intent on attaining as high marks as they could get. Participants felt that they had grown intellectually. They talked about their improved ability to analyze concepts and to see things from different perspectives.

Participants enjoyed being with younger students in the classroom and were pleased to be accepted by them. Participants looked forward to obtaining their degree and had plans for future learning.

The Research Questions

There were two specific research questions. What teaching practices do older adult learners think help them to learn best? What teaching practices do older adult learners think impede their learning? These older learners had definite ideas on what helped or hindered their learning. They thought small classes, such as tutorials with opportunities for discussion and questioning, helped them understand the course content. Lectures, by themselves, did not contribute to their learning. Participants reviewed their notes, did private reading, or attended tutorials to learn the material. They did not like lectures that were long or disorganized or where the professor talked quickly. Participants felt they learned better when professors took the time to get to know them personally, took personal interest in their progress, and offered encouragement. They resented professors who were not interested in hearing their opinions, did not acknowledge their experiences, refused to be flexible, treated them unfairly, or were intimidating. Participants felt such professors inhibited their learning. These older learners preferred writing papers compared to exams. They felt that they learned more by writing papers because they were able to

research and analyze topics and progress at their own speed. Invariably, participants attained higher marks on their papers than they did on exams.

Teaching practices that might enhance learning was not a specific research question, but the topic arose naturally, however, during the interviews when participants discussed what helped them learn best and what hindered their learning. Several people offered advice on how to improve lectures. They suggested that professors organize their lectures well and cover less material so that there is time for students to ask questions. Participants saw little point in professors reiterating in lectures what they could read from textbooks themselves. They suggested that professors speak more slowly so they could understand what was being said and take notes. One participant remarked his learning would be improved if professors and teaching assistants reversed roles. He believed that teaching assistants ought to lecture because they are very knowledgeable about the theory, having studied it recently themselves, and that professors ought to lead the tutorials because they have the life experiences needed to answer questions and solve problems. Another older learner emphasized the importance of providing an overview of the course material and demonstrating how it fit into the broader knowledge domain. He used an interesting analogy. He compared trying to find his way through the course material to finding his way through a strange city. Having an overview of the course as a “map” made learning much easier. Without an overview, he was as frustrated as he would be if he were trying to find his way through a city having only street signs as guides. Participants felt that these suggestions would improve lectures substantially.

Reflections on the research design

Three in-depth interviews one week apart in participants' homes worked very well in eliciting rich data. They provided the time and environment in which to establish trust and rapport. Journal writing as a method of data collection was disappointing. Although I had given written instructions in how to use the journal and discussed its use, most participants were not comfortable with journal writing and chose not to do so. In the future, I will not combine this method with in-depth interviews. The use of a focus group at the completion of the interviews might be a method to consider in the future. Perhaps further data may be elicited when participants have an opportunity to share their experiences.

I chose to use a computer software program, Folioviews, for data analysis. It proved to be an excellent decision. This program is a powerful search tool that helped me to code and organize the data quite efficiently. It is designed for use with data collected from unstructured interviews and so was very appropriate for my purposes. I will continue to use it in the future.

Contribution to the literature

I believe that my research makes a substantial contribution to both the adult education and gerontology literature. Very little has been written about how older adults perceive their learning experiences in either body of literature. Nine older learners have described both their perceptions of teaching practices and their experiences within the university system. Much of the research on older adults' learning is within the

experimental framework. Although there have been real efforts to improve external validity by designing tasks to resemble real life situations, the personal, psychological, social, and contextual factors that may affect findings are rarely taken into account. My research addressed these factors and demonstrates that there is a viable alternate perspective on adult intellectual and cognitive development.

Implications for Further Research

The findings of this study suggest several avenues for future research. I would find it very interesting to use this research design to explore other populations of older adults. Patient education is an important aspect of care in health care settings. A client's progress is often dependent on how well they understand the nature of their condition and requirements for rehabilitation and maintenance of optimal health. Patient education is accomplished primarily through one-to-one teaching or small group sessions. It would be fascinating to discover how both normal and cognitively impaired older clients in health care institutions experience learning in these situations and if and how their life experiences are incorporated into the teaching process.

It would also be interesting to explore older adults' perceptions of their learning experiences in other settings such as colleges and continuing education courses. Do they differ in any way from these participants' experiences in university? A comparative study could explore the differences.

Another interesting avenue of research would be to explore teachers' perceptions of older adults as students. What are their attitudes towards older adults? How do

teachers perceive older adults as learners? How do the perceptions of older adults held by teachers in colleges or continuing education programs differ from those held by teachers in university? How do teachers' instructional practices change when working with older learners? Both in-depth interviews and surveys might be used to elicit these data. The time is ripe for such research. The baby boomer generation is aging. This population is a growing market for universities, colleges, and schools of continuing education. It would be wise to be ready for them.

Implications for Teachers in Higher Education

This research suggests several implications for teaching practice. It highlights the importance of using past experience as the foundation for new learning when working with older learners and the need to use teaching practices that support this. Also, this research suggests that teachers in higher education must develop a more egalitarian teacher-student relationship with older adult students.

Using past experiences as the foundation for new learning

Acknowledging and understanding older adults' past experiences are essential if they are going to have successful learning experiences. Tennant and Pogson (1995) asserted that "the principle tension in adult education is between the experiences of the learners in a particular domain and the codified knowledge of that domain as represented in theory and research reported in books and journals" (p. 151). The challenge for teachers is to make the connection between personal experience and codified knowledge. Having

learned about students' past experiences, teachers can link the material and the learner's experiences by pointing out similarities and differences, analogous relationships, new applications, logical extensions, and possible synthesis (Tennant & Pogson, 1995). This strategy may not only enhance older adults' learning, but provide opportunities for both other students and the teacher to enrich their own understanding of the course material through the personal stories of older adults.

Sometimes adult students will discuss their past experiences as evidence of the truth of some concept or idea often in contradiction to what is being taught. This perspective can close the door to learning unless handled well by the teacher. The challenge for the teacher is to help older students to perceive their past experiences as something to be examined, analyzed, and evaluated in the light of new knowledge so that, as noted above, the connection between personal experience and codified knowledge can be made. Older students may reaffirm their beliefs or, perhaps, develop new perspectives of their past experiences.

There are a variety of ways that teachers can learn about older adults' prior experiences. Personal interviews held early in the course, pre-course questionnaires, letters about prior experiences, or resumes will provide teachers with opportunities to learn about the older adult's previous education and work experience, their goals and expectations, and their hopes and fears. Brookfield (1990) suggested that if research on students' backgrounds cannot be done prior to the start of class then one or two sessions should be devoted to this. He recommended a technique using critical incidents, brief written depictions of vividly remembered events, to obtain this information.

During the course, teachers can use teaching methods such as small group discussion, questioning, case studies, critical incidents, and role playing to link the material and learners' experiences. Rather than the teacher developing case studies, critical incidents, and role plays, they can be generated by the students from their own experiences. Through small group discussion, students could identify examples or situations related to the topic. From these, the teacher could develop case studies, critical incidents or role plays. This approach makes learning much more meaningful and relevant and provides the link with past experiences.

Linking lectures to learners' past experiences

In undergraduate education, lectures are the main teaching method used by professors. With careful planning, lectures can be better learning experiences where course material is well organized and linked to past experiences and where questioning and critical thinking are encouraged. Brookfield (1990a) outlined a way to use lectures more creatively that would link the material to learners' past experiences. He suggested beginning a lecture by researching the audience, asking questions about listeners backgrounds, current work contexts, common concerns, and asking for votes on possible themes to address. Then Brookfield proposed using the critical incident technique to have the audience identify an episode of significance in their experience that connects to the theme of the presentation. Audience members are invited to read what they wrote. The ensuing formal presentation is broken up into short segments each of which is followed by a question period on issues raised. This format may make the lecture more interesting and

at the same time acknowledge and link learners' experiences to the theme of the presentation. The method is quite appealing because it can work for both large and small groups. Perhaps teachers in higher education could incorporate Brookfield's ideas when planning their lectures.

Reflecting on one's own learning experiences

It is important to establish a more egalitarian teacher-student relationship with older adult students. Teachers in higher education need to explore their assumptions and beliefs about older adults and their attitudes toward them. Older adults bring a wealth of experience to the classroom. They have led autonomous and self-directed lives. Older adults' needs, concerns, and expectations differ from those of younger students. Teachers must address older adults needs, concerns, and expectations. They cannot be inflexible but be open to change and negotiation.

If teachers were to reflect on their own learning they would become more aware of the effects of their own actions on learners. Brookfield (1995) recommended that teachers reflect on the times that they have attended professional development workshops and explore how their life experiences were acknowledged or not, times they felt affirmed and respected as a learner and times they felt humiliated. Through reflection, they may develop insights into how to make their teaching more learner-focused and appreciate some of the experiences that older adults face when attending university.

Summary

Researching students backgrounds prior to the beginning of a course, using teaching methods that link older adults' past experiences with new learning, and learning more about what constitutes good adult education practices by reflecting on their own learning experiences are strategies that teachers might use to provide better learning environments for older adult learners. In this manner, older adults may feel affirmed and accepted and benefit much more from their learning experiences.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the learning experiences of older adults as university students. I have tried to use the participants' own voices by sharing their experiences through case studies. The themes of life experiences as lost opportunities for enhancing learning, professors as figures of authority, teaching practices: the agony and the ecstasy, and learning: the pathway to self-fulfillment were interpreted through a growth model of intellectual and cognitive development in which life experiences are the pivotal point of growth. It is my hope that researchers will explore further the learning experiences of older adults and that teachers in higher education may benefit from these findings so that they may provide better learning opportunities for older adults and increase the likelihood that their university experiences are successful.

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Appendix A

OLDER ADULTS LEARNING EXPERIENCES AS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Investigator: Barbara A. Smith, R.N., B.Sc., M.Ed.
PhD Student, Higher Education Group, OISE/University of Toronto

Supervisor: Glen Jones, Ph.D.
Professor, Higher Education Group, OISE/University of Toronto

Address: 60 Caledon Crescent
Brampton, Ontario
L6W 1C5

Phone: Home: (905) 459-1609

You are being asked to participate in a study designed to find out about older adults' (over 60 years of age) learning experiences in taking courses at university or college. You will be interviewed in your home three times, one week apart. Each interview will last about one and one-half hours. Also, you will be asked to write down in a journal any thoughts you might have about your learning experiences.

I am hoping to learn from the study something about what teaching strategies and practices older adults think are most appropriate for their learning. Based on information collected in this study, recommendations may be made regarding designing appropriate educational programs for older adult learners.

You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Your identity will remain confidential. You will have an opportunity to review the information collected and make recommendations to protect your identity further if you think it necessary. Information on you will be retained by me and used for research purposes only.

If you have any questions, please phone me at the above number.

Sincerely,

Barbara Smith, R.N., B.Sc., M.Ed.

PLEASE TURN OVER

PLEASE COMPLETE THE SECTION BELOW IF YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE

Name _____
(print)

Yes, I will participate in the study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at anytime without penalty. I understand that my identity will remain confidential.

Signature

Name: _____

Address: _____
Street Apt. No.

City

Postal Code

Phone Number: _____

The time at which I prefer to be phoned is _____

THANK YOU VERY MUCH. YOUR PARTICIPATION IS GREATLY APPRECIATED.

Appendix B

Interview Framework

Introduction:

Purpose and nature of the study.

Interviewed three times, one week apart. Please keep a journal.

In the interviews:

Will be asked about your educational experiences.

Information is for my use in completing my thesis for my PhD

Journal will help with interviews and be another source of information for me.

Informed consent. Freedom to withdraw. Confidentiality.

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Educational Level

Educational History (when)

Ethnicity:

Work Life:

Current Educational Experience:

- a. What teaching practices do older adults think help them learn best?
 - b. What teaching practices do older adults think impede their learning?
 - c. How have older adults perceptions of what helps them learn changed as they have aged?
1. Tell me about the class you are taking now. Help me to picture it. Who is there?
Where is everyone sitting? What are you doing? What is the teacher doing?
 2. Tell me about a particular experience that was significant to you while taking classes in.... What kinds of things did the teacher do? What did you think of them?
How did you feel about them? Were they helpful?
 3. Tell me what it was like to be in school as a child, as young adult, as a middle-aged person.
 4. How have your experiences with teachers and classes changed since that time?
 5. What do you think would be more helpful to you now? Things the teacher could do. Things you could do. Materials that could be used.

Appendix C

Description of Participants

Name	Sex	Age	Education	Ethnicity	Work Life	Degree	Courses
Andrew	M	76	High school commercial diploma	British	Army WW 11, career army, tax auditor	B.A.	History
Maureen	F	70	Grade 8	Dutch Mennonite	Medical Transcriptionist	B.A.	Cultural Anthropology English Literature
Ted	M	71	Grade 11	Japanese	Service manager for scientific and industrial equipment manufacturer Trained technicians	B.A.	Ancient Philosophy, English
David	M	66	B.A. MSc. Computer Science-incomplete	German	Engineer College Instructor Reliability Engineer	Minor in Physics	Calculus, Physics
Andrea	F	76	College of Arts	English	Editor, publishing company	Honour B.A.	History: Art and Architecture
Fred	M	74	Grade 9 in Hungary	Hungarian	Tool and Dye Maker, Auto Mechanic	B.Sc.	Psychology Statistics
Richard	M	67	B.A. M.Ed	Russian Jew	Advertising	Ed.D.	Consulting
Jessica	F	72	Grade 12	Anglo-Saxon	Housewife Volunteer	B.A.	History
Jeremiah	M	76	B.Com. BA	Native Indian	Grain brokerage - self employed	special student	Business Management