Doing Things the Hard Way:

A Case Study on the Experiences of A Rural Woman in Pursuit of A University Education

A Thesis

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Abstract

During and since the mid 1980's rural Saskatchewan experienced social and economic changes of an unprecedented magnitude. Prompted in large part by the rural farm crisis during that time, Kate, a rural woman, wife and mother, faced the loss of a way of life that up until that time she had taken for granted. Her response was to begin her pursuit of a university education.

This case study used a descriptive narrative and a metaphor of trails to describe the learning experiences of Kate, a rural adult student pursuing a university education. At the time of the study Kate had been taking university courses from three universities, working toward a degree in anthropology through Athabasca University and a Fine Arts Degree from either the University of Regina or Saskatchewan but taking courses from wherever she could get them. Data was collected through informal interviews and included the critical incidents that prompt her pursuit of a university education, the paths of her learning journey and the changes in herself and her life as a result of her journey. Recurring themes of Kate's learning experiences were the sense of isolation, the validation of life experiences and the change in her self-perception.

Underlying her learning experiences were two mitigating sets of circumstances. One was that the distinctiveness of the rural sub-culture manifests itself in the barriers to her learning as well as the unique familial, cultural and social context of rural areas. The other set of circumstances was found in the policies and practices of universities and the ways in which these public institutions try to meet the needs of adult learners and rural society.

Reconciliation of these perspectives to each other - an individual adult learner living in rural Saskatchewan and the practices of universities - was the underlying purpose of this study.

Thursday, January 6, 1976
Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan

In spite of everything I love the farm. On the other hand, one thing I really want to do is finish my B. Ed and get a Masters. I desperately hope that I get that chance to go back to school. I should be more positive - I'm going if it kills me!

Personal journal

I did indeed finish by B. Ed and at last my Masters Degree but not without help and encouragement. To all of you, please accept this small acknowledgement with my most profound and true feelings.

To my dear Drew and Jill, for simply being the best children in the world. Because of your maturity, independence and honesty, as well as your love and support, you have helped me achieve my goal. For being the people you are: Thank you.

To my parents, Don and Elsie Fonger, for your love, support and encouragement as well as for passing on your genes for tenacity and courage.

To my husband Nick, for your patience and for quickly learning to recognize the hand signals for *Do Not Disturb*. Above all else, thank you for your love and for sharing life with me.

To the members of my thesis committee, Dr. Carol Leroy and Dr. Paul Hart, I am very grateful for your critical reflection and high standards. In particular, to Dr. Marlene Taylor, thank you for being the consummate teacher, for bringing new and deeper dimensions to my learning and even more importantly, to my life.

And lastly, to Smoke and Ben, all things rural, meadowlarks and native prairie grasslands.

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Ten years ago the deficit on my farm was about a hundred dollars; but by well-designed capital expenditure, by drainage and by greater attention to details, I have got it into the thousands.
Stephen Leacock (1869-1944)

Chapter I. Introduction

Seeking Reconciliation

Picture this. A full-time employee of the government whose job description required a focus on the public policies of university education including issues of accessibility, accountability and financial austerity. This same person as a woman living in rural Saskatchewan witnessing rural depopulation and environmental degradation as well as personally experiencing farm failure and loss of a way of life. At the same time, she was a part-time graduate student. In reality, that was a description of my situation at the onset of this study.

Purpose of the Study

> *April 11, 1995*
> *I want to look at a single case - not the masses of students and strategic planning but a single case. Maybe there's some kind of reconciliation between what we do in Sask Ed and what that means to individuals. I couldn't talk about my single case - perhaps it's just me not other students. . . I need a voice to either work my way through the incongruity or to seek a balance - a perspective from someone else.*
> Personal journal

I made this comment in my journal after working on a number of proposed government policies dealing with access to university education, specifically in rural areas. Some of these policies included distance or multi-media education, regional learning authorities and credit

transfer - all from the perspective of university education as a public policy of government. The question that came to my mind as I reviewed and analyzed these policies was what they would ultimately mean to the end-user, that is the individual student. It was a perplexing question for me because I am also a rural adult learner.

My on-going requisite analyses of government policies pertaining to universities inevitably developed into a fascination for universities as unique institutions of public education. What makes universities unique are three related functions: research, education, and community or public service. Even though the prevailing notion was that these functions are interconnected, the balance of university activities appeared to tip toward research and education. I struggled to find indications of the ways in which universities responded to or interpreted the function of community or public service in relation to the other two functions. In particular, as I witnessed and experienced the on-going struggle and decline of rural Saskatchewan, I became increasingly interested in how universities could and should manifest these functions in rural areas.

With these perspectives in mind - the bureaucrat looking at public education policy, the rural resident searching for the ways in which universities fulfilled their role of community service and my experiences as an adult learner - I began to seek reconciliation between what I had learned about the policies and practices of universities, what I saw all around me in rural Saskatchewan and my experiences as a rural adult learner.

It was during this time of questioning and contemplation that I was introduced to another rural adult learner. Kate, a pseudonym, was in her early 40's, the mother of four energetic children ranging in age from 7 to 14, and the wife of a farmer. As we engaged in the "getting to know more about you" idle chatter, I told her that I worked for the government in Regina and she

told me that she was taking university "classes", working toward a degree in anthropology from Athabasca University but taking courses from wherever she could get them.

I was immediately attracted to her story. Certainly, there were other rural adults taking university courses either at a distance, off-campus or on-campus but I knew of none who were actively pursuing a degree through distance education. Furthermore, I knew from my policy work with distance education that student retention and completion rates of degrees through distance education were extremely low. I thought that her persistence was remarkable. As well, I knew of no other adult student juggling courses from three universities at the same time - distance or otherwise.

I believed that her individual story was worth exploring. The opportunity to do this presented itself when I actively searched for a way to reconcile what I knew about universities, how I felt about rural Saskatchewan and my own experiences as a rural adult learner. As I said in my personal journal, "I need a voice to either work my way through the incongruity or to seek a balance - a perspective from someone else."

Specifically stated, the purpose of this case study is the search for a reconciliation of my experiences as a rural adult learner and the knowledge and experiences that I had about universities, rural areas and adults as learners. To achieve this, I believed that the best action was to discover Kate's experiences through an interpretive case study and descriptive narrative. In this way I was able *to be actively receptive* and *to learn from* her experiences as an individual rural adult learner.

As I came to know more about Kate's story, to learn and interpret her experiences, I was rewarded by finding a measure of reconciliation in the validation of many of my own experiences

that I had as a rural adult learner. Many of these were personal experiences that I could put to rest after listening and learning of Kate's experiences.

I was not rewarded to the same extent with the other reconciliation that I sought, that is, university policies and practices and their connection with rural Saskatchewan. Rather, the interpretation of Kate's experiences as she wandered through nearly ten years of university courses from three separate institutions provoked new contradictions and more questions in these areas.

I opened this chapter with a quote from Stephen Leacock - one that I think is quite appropriate to this case study. In the same way that Leacock experienced farming, I experienced Kate's learning. Coming to the case study with a reasonable about of knowledge, then exploring further and interpreting Kate's experiences, I am leaving with more questions and contradictions than I brought with me - just as Leacock left his farm with more debt! Thus, I continue to be fascinated by Kate's story. It is *meaty* stuff and probably warrants further exploration in addition to the study of her learning experiences. For example, how much of her experiences is grounded in a feminist perspective? What do her children think of her learning and what role does her husband play? How does her story relate to the stages of adult development and life changes? However, I needed to confine the interpretation of her case to her learning experiences. I will begin her story with some background on the three areas of major interest: universities, rural Saskatchewan and rural adult learners.

Universities

My interest in the policies and practices of university education developed from my work

in government. Specifically this work dealt with public policies and strategic planning objectives of universities, often referred to as higher education. From this perspective I looked at trends, strategic planning, funding, post-secondary reviews, committees, roles and mandates of universities, and political agendas loaded with sentiment about the public accountability of universities and increased accessibility to students, particularly those at a distance. I was also made aware of some questions and concerns from the public - concerns about issues such as accessibility, costs, and quality of university education. Moreover, government listens to a mysterious voice that pronounces *equality of access* for rural areas - a notion not to be confused with *equality of educational opportunity.*[1]

These issues come at a particularly challenging period for universities as public education institutions. Decreased provincial and federal government funding have put most of Canada's universities in difficult financial situations. Research grants have either decreased or become more difficult to attract. Faculty unrest has been widespread across the country and student enrolments, contrary to the best forecasts, have been unpredictable.

To survive, universities are examining many options and programs including alternative funding schemes, a variety of course delivery options and incentives to attract students. Universities are undertaking initiatives such as rationalizing programs, recruitment drives, multi-media education, special fund-raising with corporate Canada and joint programming with colleges. Maintaining or increasing student populations are often an important component of

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[1]One way to differentiate the two notions is to consider *equality of access* as the same kind of education being accessible to all residents. *Equality of educational opportunity* is the provision of equal opportunities for education which may vary from place to place depending on a number of factors including the circumstances of the learner, the location and the cost.

these initiatives.

Even though most universities still tend to rely on the traditional 18- to 24-year old student population, there are a number of factors that are likely to increase the importance of adult learners (Anisef, 1989; Foot, 1996). One of these factors is that university programs and colleges will continue to be under funding pressures. Adult learners as a student group have the potential to bring much needed additional tuition revenue to universities (Human Resources Development Canada, 1994). Another factor is that some universities may be forced to close or change dramatically unless they find and justify their niche in higher education. Serving the particular needs of adult learners may be a way of establishing just such a niche.

Changes in demographics are another factor. One of the most significant developments in higher education in recent decades has been the increased participation of adult learners.[2] This increased participation means that adult students, whether they are full-time, part-time or distance education students, will very likely become an important sector of the student population (Foot, 1996; Academic and Priorities Committee, University of Saskatchewan, 1993).

Very few of these adult students will have the opportunity or option for full-time attendance. In addition, adult students often need to extend the length of time devoted to earning a degree because of family and employment obligations, financial limitations or the shortage of student spaces.

Of particular note is that among adult learners, women now represent 52% of full-time

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[2]Adult learners are identified as mature persons who are older than traditional 18- to 24-year old students. Another distinguishing feature of adult learners is that they tend to have experienced employment, as well as circumstantial and family life outside the boundaries of the education system.

students and 62% of part-time students. As well, women account for 54% of full-time graduate students, 46% of master's and 35% of doctoral students. The proportion of women is even higher among part-time students. Specifically, 63% of undergraduates, 43% of masters and 42% of doctoral students are women (Human Resources Development Canada, 1993, p.8).

Global economic competition is another factor that is likely to increase the participation of adult learners. This competition is likely to demand improved productivity, innovative economic strategies and the ability to respond and react quickly to changing economic environments. Often this will result in organizational restructuring and displacement of workers including professions. In turn, this displacement may create a stronger demand for people to stay involved - at least some of the time - in the work force beyond the age of 65.

In addition to these factors, forecasts show that growth in the traditional full-time 18-to 24-year old student population at universities will be slow for the rest of the 1990's while the need for education of people already in the workforce will increase as people re-train or re-educate throughout their lives (Foot, 1996).

Rural Saskatchewan

I am a rural resident by fortuitous happenstance not birth. In fact, I lived in the city until my early 20's. Prior to that time, summerfallow to me was a piece of farm machinery. What surprised me when I did become a rural resident, is how little we city folk knew or understood about rural life. This was, and continues to be, a source of dismay for me considering the deep agrarian roots of Saskatchewan.

Over the last decade I have become increasingly aware of the difference and disparity

between rural and urban areas. Part of my initial discovery of this difference between the two worlds originated in my reading of a report from the 1955 Saskatchewan Royal Commission on Agriculture and Family Life. One particular portion of this extensive and amazing study looked at the differences, amenities and features that distinguished rural Saskatchewan from urban Saskatchewan up to and including the mid 1950's. Although dated, some of the conclusions of the study based on circumstances in the 1950's are insightful. The study found that:

- 25 percent of rural homes were crowded and 25 percent were in need of major repairs;
- only one-third of the farms in the province would have electricity by 1956;
- of all the provinces, excluding Newfoundland, Saskatchewan ranked lowest in the percentage of homes with running water and conveniences such as flush toilets.

These, as well as other deficiencies in rural areas, prompted the Royal Commission (1955) to comment:

> If 1,000 typical homes from the small towns and farms of Saskatchewan were to be assembled and arranged on a city street the result would be a slum area of major proportions that would rival the slums of the big cities in Canada (p.39).

The effect of this study were profound. For example, the study acted as a catalyst for widespread rural electrification and better roads and services to rural residents. While no longer accurate in today's context, the report painted a picture of the large degree of disparity between rural and urban areas at the time. This disparity has obviously diminished in many, many areas. Regardless, current research (e.g. Baker, 1985; Dunleavy, 1988; McDaniel, 1986; Nachtigal, 1982, Stabler & Olfert, 1992; Tilburg & Moore, 1985) indicates that there are still inequities between rural and urban areas particularly with respect to access to education and employment

opportunities.

Rural Adult Education

Rural areas include farms as well as small towns and villages with fewer than 10,000 people. *Being rural* describes a common state of mind of rural residents, the components of which include a strong work ethic, an appreciation of nature, close family ties, a sense of tradition, and a relatively homogeneous population in economic and cultural terms. There is also a predominate interaction between family, community and career of an intensity that is not experienced in urban areas. Voluntarism, nightly meetings and community involvement are a way of life in rural areas.

Pertaining to rural adult education, access, distance and isolation are the major barriers to participation. *Distance or multi-media education courses* have been developed to ameliorate these barriers, to provide equal opportunity to education. Essentially, these terms have been used to refer to a system of education projects developed to provide an educational course *at a distance*. This includes off-campus, print material, computer-assisted instruction, and video technology.

In order to maximize the understanding of Kate's learning experiences, distance education should not be confused with *education from a distance*. *Education from a distance* is a phrase which describes the collective learning activities pursued by students who live in rural areas and who have limited access to a university campus, as well as its associated facilities and services. Kate, for example, lives about 100 kilometres from the nearest university campus. She is pursuing a university education from a distance. She is doing this by taking distance education courses

from Athabasca University, off-campus courses presented through the University of Saskatchewan and on-campus courses at the University of Regina.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the learning experiences of Kate, a rural adult learner, using an interpretive case study design and descriptive narrative. In presenting the case at hand, I made a number of assumptions about the research design, universities as public education institutions, rural adult learners and my own personal experiences.

My assumptions underlying the research design are that an interpretive study of a single-case provides the opportunity to probe and discover, in depth, the experiences of an individual - the end-user of any form of education. Another assumption with this choice of design is that I needed to accept and tolerate ambiguity. I also needed to be sensitive to the individual. Stated another way, I needed to pay attention to the individual human dimension which is the essence of an interpretive case study such as this.

I held a number of assumptions about universities. First among these is that, as public institutions, universities are accountable to the public and should provide a service to their clients, in this case, the student. This service to clients needs to be considered and modified as the student population and external environment shift. Insofar as public policy and universities are concerned, universities, not government, are the best institutions to meet the needs of students. Government policies guide the public role of universities. However, the practice and delivery of these policies manifest themselves in the services provided by universities. Ultimately, it is within the power of the universities to change or ameliorate these services.

Last in my list of assumptions about universities is that the feature that distinguishes universities from other educational institutions is the interaction of three functions: research, education, and service to the community which is in fact the larger society. Political, financial and social forces will continue to demand changes in the attitude and the operation of universities to modify and adjust these functions.

There are two overarching assumptions about rural adult learners in this study. The first assumption is that adult learners are a distinctive student population. Along with this assumption is the notion of the centrality of the *individual.* The second assumption is that there are distinctive characteristics of rural adult learners that set them apart from urban adult learners. These characteristics are the result of cultural, familial, geographic and economic influences that are not experienced in the same way by urban adult learners. Rural adult learners also face barriers to their education that are not faced by urban adult learners of which distance is the most persistent. Another barrier for rural adult learners is the lack of access to appropriate university programs and/or the sequential courses needed to meet program requirements.

The remaining group of underlying assumptions are those associated with my own personal experiences. In general, my assumptions were that my own experiences as a rural adult learner were atypical. These experiences included a sense of isolation from the community and a general lack of support for pursuing an education.

Rationale and Significance

The rationale for conducting this study is that understanding the experiences of a rural adult learner pursuing a university education from a distance is an important perspective in adult

education. The importance of this perspective is supported by the following statement from Merriam and Caffarella (1991) as they described how we might develop a better understanding of adult learning.

> Learners themselves will be a major source of our understanding of learning in adulthood. We would in fact suggest that future research in adult learning be collaboratively designed with adults who are learning on their own or in informal ways, as well as with participants in formal learning activities. We also suggest that research which takes into account the sociocultural and political context of adult learning might well advance our understanding of the problems of access and opportunity that continue to trouble the field. Finally, much of what we know about learning is derived from nonadults or select adult populations such as college students and the elderly. We suggest that there is still much to be learned about learning that takes place in adulthood (p.316).

This study will focus on developing an understanding of the perspective of an individual student. It is my belief that the experiences of individual students offer the greatest promise to making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of adult education in rural Saskatchewan.

This study is significant for a number of other reasons. Technological developments have created unlimited potential for learning opportunities and options; however, this potential must consider the distinctive needs of individual students, including their socio-economic circumstances.

Both federal and provincial governments have drastically reduced funding to universities. Many universities are in serious financial situations. Decreased funding has forced universities to

become more competitive and creative in their revenue generating abilities as well as to cut operating expenditures. Improving learning opportunities for adult learners has the potential to generate much needed revenue for universities. As demographics change, universities will need to look at this student group as well as a variety of other potential clients apart from the traditional 18- to 24-year age cohort.

Increased accessibility to a university education is an issue for many people living in rural areas as well as politicians, government policy makers and aboriginal groups. The need for fostering a 'critical mass' of rural adult learners as an important component of rural economic development and growth will likely continue. Public and political opinion will question and/or pressure universities to meet society's needs and work toward this goal.

Limitations

I have attempted to develop meaning and understanding about this case rather than draw conclusions or generate theory. Accordingly, the writing is intended to be such that the reader can naturally draw his or her own comparison to other cases.

Using a case study design to purposively understand the singular case is a limitation of this study. However, as Stake (1994) suggested, case studies can be useful in leading us toward generalization as long as we remain diligent in seeking to understand the case rather than seeking either to generalize or create theory. With this mind, case studies can enhance our knowledge by contributing to prior and subsequent research.

What we see and think and know depends on when and where we are born, on where we happen to be in time and space: hence the responsiblity to understand the contemporary scene and its motivating values and ideas to the best of our abilities so as to participate in the flow of cultural existence.

Stan Rowe, (1990). Home place: Essays on ecology p. 136

Chapter II. Literature Review

Universities, Adult Learners and Rural Saskatchewan

This study examined the learning experiences of a rural adult learner in pursuit of a university education. In the introductory chapter, I remarked that the nature of this research emerged from my three areas of interest: policies and procedures of universities and university education; rural Saskatchewan and rural adult education. Each of these areas is immense and diverse. That being the case, I needed to focus the discussion of the literature review to those concepts which are the most closely related to this particular case study.

Universities and the function of community service

Universities are among the oldest public institutions in the world, dating back to before the Middle Ages. Originally established as religious and contemplative centres of learning, modern universities are now considered the apex of educational institutions, the intellectual birthplaces of world leaders and the guardians of academic freedom. To me, they are also among the world's most fascinating organizations.

Canadian universities are public institutions in that they are supported largely by public funds. Changes to university policies, diminishing financial support and fierce competition for research funds have in many ways forced universities to evolve into complex business organizations. A large part of this evolution has been driven by the generally-accepted public mandate of universities. That mandate is a composite of three functions: research, education and community or public service (Cameron, 1991).

Of these three, research, the function of advancing knowledge, and education, the function of teaching and learning are the most entrenched in academe. Community service, a more amorphous function, is the notion that universities have a role in meeting societal needs, expectations and demands (Cameron, 1991). The focus of this discussion is located in issues around the university's function of community service as it pertains to a segment of contemporary society, adult learners and rural areas.

The function of community or public service is described as the ways in which universities meet the needs of the society (Lajeunesse & Davidson, 1992). Defining the parameters for what exactly constitutes *the needs of society* is open for interpretation. As an example, the Accessibility Task Force (1989) of the University of Saskatchewan provided this lofty and idealistic rationale for its place and role in society.

> Because we live in a world of rapid change, it is imperative that the maximum number of qualified people from the widest possible ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographical backgrounds pursue personal and intellectual development through higher education. This will give them the base of skills and understanding, the resilience, to cope with new conditions, to adapt and innovate throughout their lives, to make responsible judgments

regarding technology and social and environmental change. (p.1)

As a less discrete function than research and teaching, universities and their faculty have performed the role of public service more or less as a peripheral activity integrated with policy direction, research and teaching (Cameron, 1991; Lajeunesse & Davidson, 1992). In short, meeting the needs of society has been considered an "ancillary function to the mainstream in academic life of universities" (Lajeunesse & Davidson, 1992, p. 76). Lajeunesse and Davidson (1992) described how universities have looked previously upon their community service as a way to meet society's needs.

> Higher education institutions have, until recently, defined their community service function more in social and cultural terms than in economic terms. They have perceived themselves as a community resource, representing educational and scientific assets as well as cultural and recreational centres available to all. For faculty, community service has involved bringing knowledge and expertise to bear on the debates, issues and problems facing society (p.76).

Universities are subject to a number of different pressures which are prompting them to re-think this view of community service. One of the major pressures was and continues to be reduced government funding and financial austerity. Another is the assertion from various constituencies that universities need to play a greater role in assisting and participating in the economy (Lajeunesse & Davidson, 1992; West, 1988). As Lajeunesse and Davidson (1992) pointed out:

> the social and economic values of higher education to society are changing to include not only advancement and transmission of knowledge, in and of themselves, but also a greater

participation of institutions in the transfer and application of this knowledge in the economy (p.77).

One more pressure being exerted on universities is the increased enrolment of adult learners most of whom are part-time students (Anisef, 1989). This increased enrolment has been the leading factor for the structural change in university student population (Academic Planning and Priorities Committee, 1993; Anisef, 1989; Council of Ministers of Education of Canada, 1995; Fisher, 1995; Foot, 1996; Human Resources Canada, 1994). Of particular note is that the majority of adult learners are women.[1]

What has been happening in society to prompt this increased adult enrolment? Foot (1996) remarked on some of these changes which encouraged adults to enrol in university courses.

> ... these people were part of the large front end of the baby boom, and their presence in the labour force had created a bottleneck. Some of them decided to go back to school rather than continue to pursue non-existent job opportunities, while others decided to quit dead-end jobs and get trained for more promising careers. An economic recession and technological change further diminished job opportunities and increased the allure of postsecondary education (p.154).

This increased participation of adult learners will likely continue to grow well into the next century as the bulk of the population, the baby-boomers, grow older and pursue lifelong learning,

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[1] The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (1995) state that women now account for 53% of full-time undergraduate enrolment and 60% of part-time enrolment. Women's weaker socio-economic position relative to men's is cited by Guppy and Pendakur (1989) and Coulter (1989), as a primary mitigating factor to more part-time enrolment by women.

training and re-training programs or use education as a leisure activity (Anisef, 1989; Foot, 1996).

The extent to which universities are thought to have responded to the contemporary needs of adult learners and the larger society is largely based on one's perspective. From an institutional perspective, advocates of universities point to a number of achievements, such as corporate partnerships in research and programming including MBA programs. Many courses and degrees now include components of workplace literacy, employability skills and critical thinking as part of their course content. Entrance programs, open university requirements, certificate and programs for senior students have also been developed. Distance education courses have increased in number and improved in delivery mechanisms. Faculty and program content are focusing more attention on the skills that individuals need to have in a rapidly changing and highly technological society (Lajeunesse & Davidson, 1992; Sweet, 1989; Verduin & Clark, 1991).

Other observers provided a different perspective, stating that universities have been slow in responding to the contemporary needs of society. For example, some remarked that there is a continuing lack of appropriate and accessible opportunities for sequential and systematic part-time study (Skolnik, 1992; Thompson & Devlin, 1992). Anisef (1989) claimed that even those sequential programs that have been developed for part-time students are less prestigious and lead, not to degrees, but to certificates. Poor coordination of credit transfer between universities drew the attention of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (1995, February). Institutional services such as counselling, access to facilities and administrative procedures are organized for day-time, traditional students not adult learners the majority of whom attend part-time (Campbell, 1993; Confederation College, 1988; Cross, 1981; Fisher, 1995; Thompson and Devlin,

1992).

Taking a more business-like view of the cost-effectiveness of universities, West (1988) commented on the return-on-investment of public dollars and the cost of a university education to students. In a paper prepared for the Fraser Institute, West concluded that "productivity in the instructional activity of universities has failed to grow significantly over the last ten years" and "if there are any future improvements in productivity in universities, they must be in the form of economies in the most costly input, student time" (p.xii).

In summary, the extent to which universities are meeting the needs of adult learners and the larger society falls short of the mark (e.g. Anisef, 1989; Campbell, 1993; Confederation College, 1988; Coulter, 1989; Cross, 1981; Foot, 1996; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Skolnik, 1992 Thompson & Devlin, 1992; West, 1988).

While these comments and observations reflect an overall Canadian perspective, I would readily apply these remarks to both a Saskatchewan and a rural perspective. As the literature revealed, rural adult learners participate in education for the same reasons that urban adults do. However, the context of rural Saskatchewan does create its own particular societal needs for increased employment, community and economic development in addition to adult learning needs for training and re-training.

In this section I hoped to draw attention to one of the primary roles embedded in the mandate of Canadian universities: meeting the needs of society. Adult learners, including those from rural Saskatchewan, have enrolled in ever increasing numbers in universities. However, the extent to which universities have understood as well as met the needs of this particular group in society is questionable and would benefit from further research beyond this study.

Adult Learning: Theory, Practice and the Ubiquitous "I"

After a considerable struggle with numerous sources I came to a satisfactory and surprisingly simple base line of understanding of adult learning. Adult learning is grounded - hook, line, sinker, theory and practice - in the interaction of the situational and psychological context of the individual; the adult learning process as it is experienced by the individual; and, the accumulation of life experiences, particular motivational factors and human development of the individual learner (Boud & Griffin, 1987; Candy, 1991; Cross, 1981; Knowles, 1978; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Merriam & Caffarella; 1991; Mezirow & Associates, 1990; Schlossberg, Lynch & Chickering, 1989).

Coming to an overall understanding of adult learning theory was a formidable task. My salvation lay in the fact that I was not alone. Twenty-five years ago, Knowles (1978), one of the key figures in developing the adult learning theory of androgogy, referred to the field of adult learning theory as a "jungle" (p. 99). A more current source commented that the variety of theories in adult learning have become confusing and contradictory rather than helpful for someone trying to understand the meaning of adult learning (Cranton, 1994).

Much of the reason for the variety of adult learning theories and subsequent confusion comes from the complexity and diversity of adult learning which "probably can never be adequately explained by a single theory" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991, p. 265). Adding fuel to the fire, Cross (1981) complained that there was a lack of attention to theory in adult education. Cross (1981) claimed that the variety of theories as well as the continued lack of attention to theory arises from "the enormous diversity of adult learning situations, the practitioner domination of the field, the market orientation of nonsubsidized education, and frankly, the desire

or perceived need for theory" (p. 221).

Merriam and Caffarella (1991) presented a meaningful framework of organizing adult learning theories that I have chosen as a vehicle for discussion of the literature. Their framework organizes the nature of adult learning into theories based on the characteristics of adult learners; the life situation of adult learners; and, the changes in perspective of adults through the learning process.

Prior to this discussion I would like to reiterate a point that Boud (1987) made in his discussion of adult learning theory. Boud's declaration was that the diverse nature of learning for individual adult learners is explicit in the variety of theoretical perspectives and experiences which pertain to each and every adult learner. Thus, on an individual basis discrete theories blur or may even be re-configured (Boud, 1987). Furthermore, as Merriam and Caffarella (1991) remarked, "a phenomenon as complex as adult learning will probably never be adequately explained by a single theory" (p. 264).

Theories grounded in the characteristics of adult learners.

This group of theories is based on the distinctive characteristics of adult learners. The most widely recognized theory of this grouping is the theory of androgogy developed by Malcolm Knowles. Influenced by the work of Eduard C. Lindeman and John Dewey, Knowles (1978) developed this theory of androgogy (the art and science of helping adults learn) based on the notion that adult learners possess unique learning characteristics which are different from the characteristic of child learners. In summary, androgogy is:

premised on four crucial assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners that are

different from the assumptions about child learners, on which traditional pedagogy is premised. These assumptions are that, as a person matures, (1) his self-concept moves from being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directing human being, (2) he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning, (3) his readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles, and (4) his time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject centredness to one of problem centeredness (Cross, 1981, p.223).

Cross (1981) developed another model which she called the Characteristics of Adult Learners. Cross as well as other adult education theorists recognized that an important factor in adult learning is the circumstantial or situational context of the individual. Concerned with the absence of situational context in Knowles' theory of androgogy, she added the dimension of situational characteristics such as part-time, full-time learning, voluntary or compulsory learning (Cross, 1981).

The outstanding feature of this tradition of theories is the belief that adult learners are a distinctive group of learners (Cross, 1981; Knowles, 1978; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). This distinctiveness comes from the ways in which adults learn, how they receive and accept knowledge, and what they want to learn. Learning for adults is greatly affected by individual self-concept and is a reflective action. The nature of adult learning is often practical, self-directed and includes action as a component of learning. Learning for adults can be participatory or collaborative. It can be a formal or informal voluntary act and is mitigated by individual

psychological factors. Using life experiences as a resource is a notable characteristic in adult learning. However, these life experiences can make learning an anxious and provocative experience for adults particularly if prior learning experiences were negative.

The recognition that adult learners are a distinctive group is embedded in other adult learning theories. The extent of this recognition is such that many adult educators consider androgogy as an overall view rather than a theoretical perspective (Cross, 1981).

Theories based on an adult's life situation.

Adult's life situation theories have roots in androgogy. These roots appear in the assumption that adult learning is unique, distinctive and grounded in the individual adult's life situation. Learning occurs in everyday events and settings. Culture as a set of everyday factors and contexts influences how and what the adult learner learns. For these reasons, proponents such as Lave and Wenger (1991) claimed that adult learning is a situated social practice rather than a developmental or behavioural response.

The constituent actions for this view of adult learning are the reflection which facilitates meaning-making of life's experiences and the integration of the knowledge into daily life (Loughlin, 1993). These actions - reflection of life's experiences and integration of knowledge - result in the learning that occurs in everyday life.

The primary characteristic of teaching and learning in adult's life situation theories is that teaching and learning is best situated in authentic practice or application (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In other words, teaching and learning should be as close as possible to the social situation of the learner. In this way, knowledge has a better chance of being used when the learner needs it.

The practical application of the adult's life situation theory is accommodated by the adult student's involvement in decisions about where, what and how teaching and learning should occur. Teaching and learning are not bounded by an educational program (Candy, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). One model for educational practice is self-directed learning. Self-direction learning places the unique characteristics, goals and situational context of the individual at the centre of the learning (Boud, 1987; Candy, 1991; Cranton, 1994).

A criticism of adult's life situation theories is their tendency to reveal information about the *motivation* behind learning gleaned through the insight of the learner's characteristics, life situation and learning expectations, rather than the nature of the learning process (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). Another short-coming of the practical application of the theory is that many adult learners do not have the time or desire to take on the responsibility of designing his or her own learning.

Theories in relation to the transformation of perspective.

Adult learning theories based on adult characteristics were developed from notions of distinctive characteristics of adults. Theories based on adult life situations use the characteristics of adults in the context of the individual's life and social situations. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1991) only Mezirow's perspective transformation theory claims to explain the nature of learning that is unique to adults.

The rationale for this claim originates from the description of the cognitive forces that operate in such a way that learning occurs. These cognitive forces are the mental construction of our thoughts, assumptions and perspectives based on life's experiences into our personal meaning.

As adult learners we then use the particularly adult skill of being able to reflect critically upon these thoughts and assumptions. This critical reflection is grounded in our sociocultural situation and involves the process of reflective assessment of premises and assumptions. From this critical reflection we then facilitate our learning and proceed with an action that is based on that learning. This in turn results in a new perspective and reflection (Loughlin, 1993; Mezirow & Associates, 1990; Mezirow, 1991). Thus transformation of perspective is the primary characteristic behind this group of theories. (Mezirow, 1990; Mezirow & Associates, 1991).

Best known, or perhaps the best developed, is Mezirow's (1991) theory of perspective transformation, which he equated with emancipatory learning. Mezirow described the knowledge gained from emancipatory learning "as that gained through critical self-reflection, as distinct from the knowledge gained from our 'technical' interest in the objective world or our 'practical' interest in social relationships" (p.87).

As individuals, our understanding of the world is derived from cultural experiences in childhood. Usually this understanding remains subconscious in adulthood. Even though this understanding is subconscious, it becomes a important determinant for the way in which we interpret or make meaning of our experiences. Interpretation of experiences involves the actions of confirmation, rejection, extension and developing beliefs. Through this interpretation we develop meaning schemes - our own personal beliefs, attitudes and emotional reactions. Adult learners engaged in reflective learning either confirm these beliefs, attitudes and reactions or transform them to new and different understanding. In other words, learning is the process of either confirming existing meaning or developing a new or revised interpretation of meaning and experiences. Mezirow (1991) said we learn "in order to add to, extend, or change the structure

of our expectations, that is our meaning perspectives and schemes; learning to change these structures of meaning is fundamentally transformative" (p. 62).

For convenience I have included Mezirow's transformative learning theory in this group of adult learning theories. Linked by the concept of perspective transformation, Mezirow's transformative learning theory described the emancipatory social action of perspective transformation as a collective action of individuals. Facilitating the collective critical reflection and subsequent social action is the role of education. The result of this collective action is social change. Thus, transformative learning theory is meant to describe a theory of adult *education* rather than a theory of adult *learning* (Boud, 1987; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Mezirow & Associates, 1991).

At the onset of this discussion I referred to the ubiquitous "I" as a means to draw attention to the underlying centrality of the individual in adult learning theories. Adult learning is conditional on the psychological and sociocultural setting of each individual adult. For individual adult learners, learning is an activity that is added to the activities of the many other roles that they play such as worker, parent and care-giver. These roles arise from the context of their lives, which is in turn intimately tied to the sociocultural setting in which they live (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

The subject of this study lives in rural Saskatchewan. There is a distinctiveness of being a member of a subculture unique to rural communities; that is, a group of people who share unique life experience or unique qualities within the larger society (Tilburg & Moore, 1985).

This next section provides a description of the rural subculture, the circumstances of rural Saskatchewan during the time of this study and an overview of rural adult education. By

providing first the theory and then contextual information, I hope to develop an understanding of the integration of theory and practice that may be manifested in the learning experiences of the individual adult learner who is the subject of this case study.

Toward An Understanding of the Rural Subculture

From an overall perspective, rural areas can have much the same diversity of economic, ethnicity and culture as do many urban centres. However, there are dominant demographic, economic and social conditions that mark being rural in contrast to being urban (Barker, 1985).

Observers of rural adult education described a number of urban/rural distinctions as a background for their discussions (Barker, 1985; Nachtigal, 1982; Tilburg & Moore, 1985). Rural areas are characterized by an agricultural or similar natural resource-based tradition, sparse population, isolation and loosely knit communities. Urban areas tend to have more service occupations and serve as education and government centres. Unemployment and poverty are higher in rural areas and housing standards are lower. There are fewer cultural attractions and public services are minimal (Barker, 1985; Nachtigal, 1982; Stabler & Olfert, 1992). Conversely, many rural residents consider that agrarian values, beliefs, and traditions as well as a slower pace and lower crime rates counterbalance many of the short-comings (Tilburg & Moore, 1985).

Obviously, rural areas have a lower population density in comparison to urban areas. The composition of the population in a given rural area is also distinctive, tending to be more homogeneous in ethnic background, wealth and traditions. This means that there is less differentiation and demographic stratification within the total population than in urban areas.

Rural areas are identified by a predominance of personal, face-to-face social relationships

among similar people and a comparative slowness in altering the traditional cultural heritage. Rural residents have a closer association with nature and are more influenced by the natural environment than urban residents. In rural areas, there is a particular way of social functioning that has evolved from the overarching interaction of family, community, and career (Nachtigal, 1982; Tilburg & Moore, 1985). As Nachtigal described in this commentary:

> In general, the layers of bureaucracy found in large urban/suburban communities are lacking in small communities. Communication can, therefore, be more direct, and verbal transactions can be substituted for written communiques. The validity of information is likely to be based as much on who said it as on what was said. Social relationships are more personal and tightly knit; people are known as individuals, not just statistics. Small-town rural society is generally more integrated, with individuals performing multiple roles. Running the town's business is a part-time job; construction workers still have multiple skills; doctors, when available, are general practitioners, not specialists; businesspeople tend to be entrepreneurs, not employees of large retail chains. Values tend to be more traditional, with more family structure intact, although this is changing in communities where in-migration is taking place. Traditionally, rural communities are more homogeneous in terms of race and socioeconomic status. Time is still measured by the seasons of the year rather than the ticking of a time clock. In rural areas, a man's word is still likely to be a binding agreement; trust is not yet a thing of the past (pp.7,8).

Tilburg and Moore (1985) went so far as to suggest that people living in rural areas should be considered as a *subculture* sharing common characteristics, attitudes, values, and motivations that differentiate rural residents from those living in urban areas. Furthermore, these

attributes are common in rural areas around the world modified by local dimensions and circumstances such as economic and environmental conditions (Nachtigal, 1982).

Rural Saskatchewan - 1980's and beyond

About one-half of Saskatchewan's population was considered rural at the time of this study (Stabler, Olfert, & Fulton, 1992). Agriculture and agriculturally related activities are the primary economic activities. From the depression in the 30's until the mid-1980's, changes in rural areas were cyclical with poor crop years and depressed economic circumstances followed by periods of recovery. In total however, the balance over this time was positive. Transportation systems improved, rural telephone and electrical service became wide spread in rural areas and consumer conveniences long taken for granted in urban places rural areas became commonplace (Stabler & Olfert, 1992).

Since the mid-1980's unprecedented and significant economic and social changes have occurred in rural Saskatchewan (Stabler & Olfert, 1992). World overproduction of grains, the failure of the General Agreement on Trades and Tariffs (GATT) , drought and high interest rates brought about changes in agriculture and rural communities that had never been experienced before (Stabler, Olfert & Fulton, 1992). Rural unemployment rates were above those in urban areas, poverty rates were higher as well. Acting as a multiplier effect, the hardships facing farmers exacerbated the economic problems of rural areas and depopulation continued. Ultimately the entire province was affected.

These economic changes forced change on communities and individuals in ways that could not have been predicted. Farm size increased, substituting capital for labour and increasing the

out migration of farm families. Population shifts caused the consolidation of public sector facilities such as hospitals, schools, and administrative offices. This consolidation expanded and upgraded the infrastructure in growing towns and cities while depleting the infrastructure in smaller communities and rural areas. Technological infrastructure, such as satellite locations and fibre optics were also consolidated (Stabler & Olfert, 1992).

Improved transportation systems had their own impact, which was sometimes detrimental to rural areas (Stabler, Olfert & Fulton, 1992). There were shifts in shopping patterns and the urbanization of rural tastes so that rural businesses already hampered by a poor farm economy suffered at the hands of more urban centres. Rail line abandonment became a death knell for many small towns. In comparison to larger towns and urban centres, smaller rural communities became increasingly inferior in their provision of services, unable to provide the libraries, schools and hospitals in the same way that larger, urban centres could. Over time, residents used the medical, commercial and recreational facilities at a distance and underutilised the ones at home.

Kate, whose experiences are the subject of this case study lives near a town that Stabler and Olfert (1992) categorized as a *minimum convenience centre*. The most distinguishing feature of this type of rural centre is that there is no single presence such as a hospital, school, library, or business that can be counted on to be permanent or present (Stabler & Olfert, 1992). In other words, there is no core of permanent businesses and no guarantee of medical, education or public services and buildings. Furthermore, they predicted that these areas will continue to decline which will further worsen unemployment rates and rural depopulation.

Certainly, the decade of the 80's was difficult for the farm economy and rural centres but the decline of the rural economy during these times also produced social and family problems. As

Butala (1994) commented:

> The circumstances of our neighbors and acquaintances grew more and more critical and the talk everywhere - on the streets, on coffee row, at dances and family gatherings - grew more and more despairing. Loss was everywhere around me, fear, anger and an omnipresent, inexorable sadness at the destruction of a way of life several generations old and of the dream of the future that had proven to be unattainable (p. 177).

Rural Education and Rural Adult Learners

In the preceding section I commented on the nature of the Saskatchewan's rural subculture and rural communities, using the particular economic and social circumstances that affected them during the last decade. To complete an understanding of the learning experiences of the subject of this study, I investigated literature on rural adult education. While significant attention has been given to adult learners as a group, there has been a strong urban bias to educational research and only limited attention to rural adult education (Tilburg & Moore, 1985).

A review of the literature revealed very little about the needs and experiences of rural adult learners, particularly in the Canadian context or in pursuit of a post-secondary education. I found none which focused on a rural woman's perspective. Most of the literature tended to view rural education from a different focus, such as the delivery and technology of distance education or in the context of isolated areas or special populations. As Tilburg and Moore (1985) stated, "much of the rural education literature has not addressed the rural subculture as a unified group sharing common characteristics, attitudes, values and motivations" (p. 538). In spite of the

paucity of information, there are important concepts about rural adult education that I found valuable for the purposes of this study. Most notable of these concepts is that while there are many shared commonalities among urban and rural adult learners, rural adult learners are subject to distinctive circumstances and dispositional characteristics that set them apart from their urban counterparts.

Urban and rural adult learners are thought to be alike in how and why they learn (Barker, 1985; McDaniel, 1986). For example, rural and urban adult learners are thought to learn alike and have the same educational needs and expectations. Both groups of learners are motivated by the same reasons to participate in education including occupational advancement, personal development, social relationships or changes in personal circumstances (Dunleavy, 1988). Admission and academic requirements are the same for both groups. Finally, just as with the population of urban adult learners, women tend to participate in rural education more than men (Dunleavy, 1988).

Rural and urban adult learners also experience many of the same problems of returning to and participating in university education (Campbell, 1993; Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982; Fisher, 1995; McDaniel, 1986; Thompson & Devlin; 1992). For example, the natural circumstances of adult life almost guarantee that adult learners will be involved in a number of activities in addition to studying. These circumstances as well as institutional organization and administration, adult responsibilities, personal attitude and past learning experiences have come to be known as *barriers* to education for both rural and urban adult learners (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982).

The literature identified Cross (1981) as the progenitor of the term *barriers* to adult

education (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). Over time, modifications have been made to her ideas but in general these barriers are referred to as:

- situational barriers which relate to a person's situation at the time;
- dispositional barriers which refer to a person's attitude towards herself and her learning;
- informational barriers which indicate that there is a lack of awareness of educational opportunities;
- and, institutional barriers, which are the result of the management and organization of the educational institution (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982).

In spite of sharing many characteristics, circumstances and barriers, there are differences between urban and rural adult learners. The most notable of these is the additional barriers faced by rural adults.

McDaniel (1986), through a research study of adult learners in seven north-west states identified some of these additional barriers. For example, the findings of the study showed that, in addition to distance, lack of timely access to instructors, counsellors, administrative offices and libraries was an additional barrier to rural learners. Another major barrier was the limited variety and availability of classes. (Barker, 1985; Cross, 1981; McDaniel, 1986; Thompson & Devlin, 1992; Tilburg & Moore, 1985).

The literature also revealed that rural adults had different dispositional, personal and situational barriers (Barker, 1985; Dunleavy, 1988; McDaniel, 1986; Tilburg & Moore, 1985). In comparison to urban adult learners, rural adults tended to have completed fewer years of formal education. They were more likely to feel uncomfortable in their academic abilities and often feel that they are too old to learn. Rural adult learners were also concerned with how family

members or individuals in the community might react to their interest in education - a barrier that is unlikely in urban areas (Tilburg & Moore, 1985).

Many rural adult learners felt that they were at a "cultural disadvantage" because of their lack of access to plays, concerts, lectures and social events. Rural adult learners appeared to have more problems with finding suitable child care. As well, additional travel costs and associated expenses for rural residents can become particularly burdensome during times of a depressed farm economy. Dunleavy (1988) added that "limited employment opportunities for rural adults also diminish the desire for formal education and training" (p. 10).

Data from another study on rural barriers reviewed by Tilbury and Moore (1985) suggested that rural adults appear to have family, career and community more intensely integrated into their personal lives in comparison to their urban counterparts. The result of this integration is that free time to pursue an education was limited and difficult to juggle around the activities of family and community. In addition, in most cases, only the individual adult learner considered educational pursuits of primary importance.

Finally, an interesting investigation by Tilburg and Moore (1985) is worthy of mention at this point in the discussion. Tilburg and Moore examined the research on the factors that acted as barriers or motivators to participation in rural adult education. The data suggested that *primary motivators* for participation were the personal attributes of traditional moral values and attitudes of independence and self-reliance which appear to prevail in rural populations. One of the major factors that participants indicated as a *barrier* was the inherent personal interaction with other students such as sharing information and personal interests with class members. In short, Tilburg and Moore suggested that isolation may be self-imposed and even desirable by some rural adult

learners.

Summary

I reviewed the literature reviewed in these areas: universities, adult learning, rural Saskatchewan and rural adult education. The discussion on universities concentrated on their role in meeting society's needs particularly adult learners. I followed this section by describing a theoretical background for understanding of adult learners. Underlying these theories is the notion that the individual, his or her unique situational context, and his or her own personal learning needs are germane concepts in any theory of adult learning.

Using this understanding of the centrality of the individual in adult education I examined the particular sociocultural aspects of this case study - the context of rural Saskatchewan during the last decade and the nature of rural adult education. Spurred on by rural depopulation and the recent economic recession in rural Saskatchewan, post-secondary education for rural adults received public and governmental interest as a necessary vehicle for meeting the societal needs of rural areas. This interest was and will likely continue to be linked to attempts to foster economic development and rural rejuvenation.

I began this literature review with an investigation of one of the primary functions of universities - specifically, meeting the needs of society. In Saskatchewan, an important constituent of our society is the individual rural adult learner. There are differences between urban and rural adult learners mainly in the types of barriers to learning but also in particular dispositional characteristics unique to the rural subculture.

Maps are a way of organizing wonder.

Peter Steinhart, "Names on a Map" in PrairyErth (a deep map) by William Least Heat-Moon (1991).

Chapter III. Method

Unfolding the Map

In the first chapter I stated that the purpose of this study was to learn from the experiences of Kate, a rural adult learner. I did this as a way to search for a reconciliation of my own experiences as a rural adult learner and the knowledge and experiences that I had regarding universities, rural Saskatchewan and rural adult learners.

This study followed a qualitative research methodology, specifically an interpretive case study design and descriptive narrative. One primary goal of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of the reality of the individual. My desire to develop a deeper understanding of the reality of Kate's learning experiences as a rural adult learner prompted my choice of a qualitative methodology. I was also aware that qualitative research is grounded in a naturalistic paradigm which recognizes and advocates that the reality of the individual is best understood from the setting in which she exists. Two components of Kate's setting are universities and rural Saskatchewan.

As a way to develop an understanding of the reality of the individual, the researcher becomes a key research instrument - inquiring, probing, interpreting and describing experiences. Narrative writing is used to provide the descriptive nature of the research. In this way, writing

also becomes a means of inquiry and discovery.

The focus of qualitative research is on "understanding and describing process more than behavioural outcomes" (Merriam, 1991, p.31). In other words, qualitative research focuses on developing insight into the experiences of the individual rather than a measurement of the outcome. In this case study for example, I am most interested in learning about Kate's *experiences,* not the outcome of her efforts. Reaching a better understanding of the participant's reality is the most important concern of qualitative research.

Learning from the reality of the individual becomes an inductive, rather than deductive, process of data analysis. As Loughlin (1993) stated, "The analysis does not superimpose a structure on the data, but rather the meaning is allowed to emerge" (p. 89). Thus there exists a tacit understanding: the nature of qualitative research is such that the researcher's analysis of the data becomes an intuitive, creative and somewhat ambiguous process.

The Research Design

I selected a case study research design to fulfill the purpose of this study. This choice recognized the unique influences and situational contexts that prevailed upon the learning experiences of this adult learner who was the subject of the study. There are, for example, unique social and cultural influences in rural Saskatchewan that act upon Kate's learning. Kate lives at a distance from a university campus. There are virtually no other adults taking university courses living nearby. She is not bound with any other students in a single university, faculty or program. These social and cultural influences cannot be separated from her learning experiences. This choice of a case study design is supported by the following observation from Yin (1984):

"Case study is a design particularly suited to situations where it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context" (Merriam, 1991, p.32).

Selection of the case

Kate, a pseudonym, is a married woman in her early 40's living on a farm about 120 kilometres from Regina. She has lived in the same general area all her life. As the daughter of a grain elevator agent she moved from town to town, all within about 100 kilometres of where she now lives. Directly out of high school, she spent one year in Fine Arts at the University of Regina, during which time she continued to date a boy she had met in high school. She quit the university and moved with her boyfriend to Kelowna - to work and see something of the world. They returned home after less than a year, got married and went farming on his parents' farm. For about two years, Kate worked as a secretary, then as a care-giver to disabled people. Then she began her family and dropped out of the workforce completely.

Today, she is the mother of four active children, ranging in age from 12 to 18 at the time of this research. Kate's husband works long hours in the busy farming season, fewer hours in the winter months. She works on a seasonal basis in the service industry.

Kate has taken university courses, delivered in a variety of ways, from three universities for more than a decade. In itself, I believe that this is unique; however, it is even more remarkable when this is considered with the fact that she has accomplished all this while living at a distance from any university campus. She has actively pursued an education from a distance.

The unique circumstances and learning experiences of Kate provided the basis for the case study. As Robert Stake (1994) remarked, case study is defined by interest and what can be

learned specifically by an individual case rather than the generalization beyond. He also said that, " we take the case from which we feel we can learn the most" (p.243).

The understanding gained from the individual case might well provide insight into larger issues or refinement of theories such as those about rural adult learners or the policies and practices of universities. Stake (1994) cautioned, however, that damage to the study can occur when "the commitment to generalize or create theory runs so strong that the researcher's attention is drawn away from features important for understanding the case itself" (p.238). He also warned that directly comparing one case with other cases can diminish opportunities to learn the most that we can from the particular case at hand.

Data Collection and Analysis

In choosing ways to organize their study, researchers often accentuate one task or another. In this case study the tasks that I have accentuated are the process of interactive interviews, writing as a means of inquiry, and descriptive narrative to present the case. In this way I tried to maximize my understanding of the case.

The process of developing understanding began and continued to evolve through the interactive interviews between myself and Kate. Ambiguity was inherent in this interaction; nevertheless, as the interviews continued I developed insight into her experiences. During this process I was also sought regularity in themes, insights and experiences. My use of writing (and rewriting) as a means of inquiry was a critical element in attempting to reconstruct Kate's learning experiences.

My researcher role, a critical component in data collection and analysis, along with the

narrative writing of the study should be "stated upfront" (Janesick, 1994, p.214). As a component of data collection my role as researcher becomes key in and of itself. The idea of researcher as *method* originates from the simultaneous activities of data collection (through the interview process), analysis (to clarify meaning) and writing (to explore and reflect on my thoughts). These activities carried on throughout the data collection and analysis.

Mishler (1986) comments that the "effects of the interviewer and the interview" are seriously underestimated in their work (p. 82). The way in which the interviewer listens, attends, encourages, interrupts, and digresses is integral to the respondent's account. He stated that it is in this specific sense that "a story is a joint production" (p.82).

Mishler (1986) also noted that considering the role of the interviewer in the research process can be a problem; however, "it is not solved by making the interviewer invisible and inaudible, by painting her or him out of the picture" (p.83). Thus, as researcher I will describe my relationship with the subject, Kate. Specifically, I was introduced to Kate through a mutual acquaintance but we had very little contact before our involvement in this study.

The interview process.

September 25, 1996
It was a magical day at a deserted beach. I arrived shortly before the time that I had arranged to meet with Kate and sat and looked at the absolutely magnificent scenery of Crooked Lake nestled in the Qu'Appelle Valley. The leaves were turning and it was misty. There were left-overs from summer yet it was absolutely deserted - a stopped motion as if someone had just been there and suddenly left. Kate came looking for me across a grassy area.

For some reason I got the feeling that her being there was part of a self-imposed isolation and I felt quite privileged to be invited in. She seemed a little more focussed on the school, objective side of things. More deliberate in her statements wanting to make

them worthwhile, substantial, something there. By the end, she was more relaxed and comfortable - a good day I think!

Field notes

I have included this description from my field notes to give a sense of how the relationship between Kate, as participant, and myself, as researcher, changed and evolved over the course of the interviews. Kate and I began our interviews in late summer. We met over a two-month period in five semi-structured interviews, each about three hours in length. The interviews were held in her home and at her lake cottage - surroundings chosen by Kate that seemed to encourage comfortable and enlightened discourse. Spacing the interviews about ten days apart allowed me to reflect, identify areas where I needed to probe deeper and develop questions for further understanding. Kate gave me a sense of direction as well, taking me into experiences that I did not anticipate at the onset of the case study. I taped all the interviews with a tape recorder, then transcribed all the interviews. Field notes were added following each interview and as I transcribed the audio tapes.

The first interview began tentatively, generally following the framework of issues. Very soon the comfort level improved for both Kate and me, and developed into the kind of rapport or "linguistic discourse" (Mishler, 1986) of research interviewing.

As I indicated before, an underlying premise of qualitative research is that the researcher is a key research instrument. I began with a framework of questions (Appendix A) to help initiate a semi-structured, open-ended interview format. At the first interview, I familiarized Kate with the purpose and nature of my research and reviewed the framework of questions. The questions were not meant to act as a strict protocol but were used to provide a framework from which to

structure the interviews; to keep data collection and analysis manageable; and, to help focus the research.

Besides providing these functions, I found that the framework encouraged and provided a level of comfort for Kate - almost like a concrete object for her to lean back on if she needed it. In time a mutual understanding and natural social bond developed between us - features which are primary and necessary characteristics of qualitative research (Loughlin, 1993; Mishler, 1986).

Within this mutual understanding and social bond, I needed to be alert to changes in direction, part of the inherent ambiguity of this type of research. Initially, I think that Kate was concerned more about what I wanted to hear rather than what she wanted to tell me. (I confirmed this suspicion as I listened to the tapes and reflected on Kate's comments after the first session.) To counteract this I became a diligent listener and learner about Kate's experiences. I worked consciously to put aside my assumptions about adult learners, universities and rural areas to be taught by Kate and thus learn about her experiences. Letting go of my assumptions did increase the level of ambiguity but it also encouraged greater rapport and increased the understanding between us. More importantly, I believe this rapport and understanding showed the human dimension, the *esprit de corps*, of case study research. This human dimension shone through as we laughed at ourselves in mutual understanding as rural women, adult learners and mothers of teenagers!

Early in the data collection process I became aware that I needed to be involved in the simultaneous activities of data collection and analysis. After each interview I made field notes and reflected on the day's interviews as a way to prepare for the next interview session. This helped to maintain the purpose of the study while uncovering themes that needed further

clarification or fuller explanation. Throughout the data collection process I searched for recurring themes, reviewing the results and reflecting on further questions that I needed to ask Kate to understand her learning experiences more fully. These questions would initiate the focus of the next interview and I would become a learner again.

The interviews became more open-ended which enabled the linguistic discourse described by Mishler (1986). For example, as researcher, I would retrace my steps, probe deeper into some of Kate's experiences and encourage her to elaborate and critically reflect on her experiences. Thus the interviews became an evolutionary process being derived from the interaction between Kate and myself. Themes were often reviewed and verified to achieve a mutual understanding of Kate's meaning and experiences.

Three features of the research process helped me develop an understanding of Kate's learning experiences: my attention to the interview process as linguistic discourse, my conscious efforts to be a learner, and the development of the natural social bond between Kate and me. As a result of these features I believe that I collected valuable research data.

Data analysis.

The nature of qualitative research is such that data collection, data analysis and writing are not discrete activities. The importance of writing for inquiry and analysis is such that it warrants special mention. Van Manen (1990) made this observation:

> Writing as a research activity creates the reflective cognitive stance that generally characterizes the theoretic attitude in the social sciences. The object of human science research is essentially a linguistic project: to make some aspect of our lived world, of our

lived experience, reflectively understandable and intelligible (p.125).

As inquiry, I repeatedly used writing to clarify my thoughts, to learn through hermeneutic discovery or to reflect on my assumptions. The case content as Stake (1994) pointed out, "evolves in the act of writing itself" (p.240).

To understand, learn and give meaning the act of writing becomes a dialectic process. Van Manen (1990) provides this description of the dialectic process.

> We come to know what we know in this dialectic process of constructing a text (a body of knowledge) and thus learning what we are capable of saying (our knowing body). It is the dialectic of inside and outside, of embodiment and disembodiment, of separation and reconciliation (p. 127).

The writing of a qualitative work is not a mechanistic activity. Richardson (1994) commented that, "unlike quantitative work, which can carry its meaning in its tables and summaries, qualitative work depends upon people's reading. . . . Qualitative research has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading" (p.517).

During the activity of writing I was mindful not only of emerging themes, but also of how the parts of the discourse and text were internally connected. This awareness of the 'textual' was stimulated by reading Mishler (1986). He advises that attention needs to be paid to units of linguistic expression and how they are connected to each another. The way in which units of linguistic expression are connected or how they are temporally ordered can affect the relation between the narrative and the reality.

I began the analysis of the data by identifying recurring themes which emerged from the interviews. Once the interviews were transcribed and the field notes incorporated, I clustered

these themes and used narrative writing to manage and select the data. During this and subsequent writing phases I stayed close to the data (Janesick, 1994) and heeded Mishler's (1986) advice to maintain linguistic integrity by seeking narrative units, remaining mindful of temporal order and meaningful linguistic connections.

At one point when I felt overwhelmed by the task of data analysis, I gratefully acknowledged Janesick's caution of the danger "in becoming so taken up with methods that the substantive findings are obscured" (Janesick, 1994, p. 215). By staying close to the data, seeking recurring themes, and finding and paying attention to textual connections, I was able to develop an initial conceptual framework of themes.

The second part of my analysis of the data became "an organized compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and/or action taking" (Huberman & Miles, 1994, p.429). Using concept webbing and matrices with text while retaining the textual connections and integrity of the data, I was able to compress the data into a narrative which I believe captured the essence of Kate's learning experiences. I also looked for negative examples to check any inferences that I made. As the analysis continued, I identified relationships that connected portions of the description with explanations offered in the literature, the interview transcripts and my field notes.

In summary, my process of data collection and analysis developed from an immersion in the setting and the establishment of the natural social bond between Kate and me. As the interviews went on, I would often put ideas and notions aside to refresh themselves order to become aware of nuances or intuitive insights. I discussed, probed and questioned these insights with Kate to expand my awareness and clarify my understanding.

Ongoing throughout the process was my use of writing and rewriting. As an activity of creative synthesis, I wrote and rewrote Kate's story in a narrative form using a metaphor to express her experiences as an adult learner.

Ethics

Stake (1994) calls qualitative researchers "guests in the private spaces of the world" and proposed some guidelines research ethics (p.244).

1. Issues of observations and reportage should be discussed in advance.
2. Limits of accessibility should be suggested and agreements heeded.
3. Great care must be taken to reduce the risks and protect the human subject.
4. Avoid low-priority probing of sensitive issues.

As a guest, I was mindful of crossing boundaries or entering into conversations that may have been painful for Kate. During my role as listener and researcher I was careful not to probe deeply into subjects or areas that I felt left Kate uncomfortable or where I had no business to be. My goal was to learn and understand as much as I could about Kate's learning experiences. To do this meant developing intense personal interest in situations and circumstances; however, as a researcher I decided on one or two occasions not to pursue and probe certain themes that I felt crossed the line of research ethics. I believe that the omission of these themes does nothing to interfere with the shared meaning of Kate's learning experiences.

Prior to the study I obtained formal ethical approval from the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (Appendix B).

And that was why I so loved the trails and paths we made. They were ceremonial, an insistence not only that we had a right to be in sight on the prairie but that we owned and controlled a piece of it.

Wallace Stegner, (1962). Wolf Willow, p. 271

Chapter IV. Findings

The Trails and Paths of Kate's Learning Experiences

Wallace Stegner, renowned author, claimed that his early years on the prairie near Eastend, Saskatchewan were the most influential of his life. Stegner loved the prairie landscape and wrote passionately about it. He also wrote about the impact that the prairie had on the culture and traditions of the people who lived there. As the above quotation indicates he loved to explore the paths and trails made by wagons, carts, deer and cattle. In much the same sense, Kate, a rural Saskatchewan woman, loved her learning landscape and liked to explore the trails and paths of her learning. Her commitment to obtaining a university education, in spite of distance, I believe is her way of insisting that she had a right to have access to higher education and that she owned and controlled her learning experiences.

I selected the metaphor of trails to present Kate's learning story for a number of reasons. First, trails and paths are very much a part of rural Saskatchewan and I wish to put out in front the situational context of Kate's story - that being the situation of living and learning in rural Saskatchewan.

A second reason for the metaphor of trails is to imply a feeling of movement. Trails and

paths bump head-on into horizons then carry on - over another hill or around a corner. They are full of curves, obstacles and detours. They come and go. People take trails and are changed to a greater or lesser extent by the trail that they take. Sometimes, they take trails and don't return.

Trails and paths encourage movement through or around obstacles in much the same way as Kate has approached her pursuit of education: in spite of barriers and obstacles she took actions in order to maintain her pursuit of a university education while living at a distance.

The third reason to use the metaphor of trails and paths is to convey the message of a journey. Being on a journey implies that we should be openly receptive to the experiences and sights along the way to the destination. I believe that Kate was receptive to her learning journey by truly engaging herself in the learning process and by pursuing her love of learning. Each and every course she took became a stop, a site to visit and enjoy along the way.

Starting off from the Home Place

A trail or path begins somewhere. Kate's learning story began from her *home place*, a farm term used to describe the centre of the farming operation. The home place of Kate's learning story is made up of three parts: the physical setting, the economic, social and cultural setting in which she lives, and her own state of being at the time that she became an adult learner.

The physical setting for Kate's learning story is in rural Saskatchewan. Kate lives on a farm about half way between two small towns. The farm is about three kilometres from the highway . Even though the farm is not inaccessible, it has a feeling of isolation. She certainly doesn't have neighbours within eyesight. The organized and spacious farmyard is surrounded by trees. Flowers and a large garden are prominent features in the yard. The frame house, painted

white with green trim, looks like what we have come to expect old Saskatchewan farm houses to look like - two-storied and utilitarian.

Inside the home, the surroundings are telling. Not blessed with unlimited financial resources, Kate has used colour and creativity to charm the best out of traditional architecture and materials - old fir plank flooring in the living room painted deep pink, complemented with vivid colours, a painted faux carpet (done with the help of her youngest son), her own paintings, scattered photographs of her family and pieces of sculpture. It's comfortable, courageous and lively in colour and attitude.

The location of Kate's home and farm is in an area that has relied heavily on agriculture for more than 100 years. This reliance on agriculture - its ups and downs - continues today and influences the social, cultural and economic setting of the area and the people who live there. For example, Kate first began taking university courses around 1988 - a difficult time economically for agriculture, the major source of income for Kate's family. Stabler and Olfert (1992) described the Saskatchewan economic outlook around this time:

> Macrostatistics which reflect economic and social well-being reveal a worsening of rural conditions compared with the same indicators for urban areas....Rural unemployment rates were above those for urban areas and rose relative to urban unemployment rates during the last decade. Poverty rates as well were higher in rural areas and rose relative to urban poverty during the 1980s (p.1).

They claimed that the decade of the 1980's was the decade of rural decline and unprecedented change in a rural way of life. Saskatchewan author Sharon Butala (1994) provided a more human perspective of the social and cultural changes of this time.

> Nothing was the way it had been ten years earlier. Wherever necessity dictated and there were jobs to be found, farm people went to work off the farm (pp.174).

This is how Kate remembered those times.

> *It was - it had to do with everyone else being productive and I wasn't. I never even looked at all the ways that I was productive at home and when I was working at home I attempted to be super mom. I sewed all their clothes - underwear, bathing suits - I cooked - the kids had homemade bread and porridge for breakfast. I mean - we never bought bread, we never bought vegetables, we never bought any jam. I raised my own chickens - I never looked at any of that just because I wasn't bringing in a salary. And... at the same time, the farm was no longer paying for itself.*

A large *sense* of living in rural Saskatchewan is derived from belonging to the community even though assimilation into a rural community can be difficult. From her own experiences moving from an urban centre into a rural area, Butala (1994) confirmed that assimilation is enigmatic. She wrote about *belonging* in rural Saskatchewan as she spoke about her move from a urban area into a rural life in this way:

> Truly belonging to the community of women in the way I'd belonged to my community in the city was going to be much harder than I'd thought. I still didn't understand that I would never have the conversations with my rural women friends that I had had with by urban friends. I would never have them because not just the daily round of activity but the approach to life, the view of it, was utterly different (p.32).

Like Butala, a theme from Kate's life was that she also felt as if she did not belong or fit well into the community. Even though Kate had lived in a variety of towns close by she was not

born or raised in the specific town or surrounding area. This meant that she was an outsider from her first arrival. More importantly, Kate felt that she was an outsider, someone who was considered strange from an emotional and intellectual position. Kate talked about how she felt about not fitting into the community or having the same interests as other women.

> *I never fit in. I never fit in any way to be perfectly honest. I was always considered strange. I don't know why.*

Twenty years after coming to the area, Kate told me that the feeling of being different and not fitting in persists.

> *Even now, I don't fit in. I don't care who my neighbours are - I just don't. I wish I did. I've been here for twenty years and some of them 40 years. And it makes a difference. People don't talk to me about what the neighbours are doing or whatever. It makes things different.*

She used the example of her home life as a symbol of the extent to which she felt she didn't fit in.

> *I mean for me everything is totally different. I mean everything. You know like everything - even what you cook for supper is so different.*
>
> ***(with emphasis)** I mean if you can't even fit in with what you're feeding your kids what the hell are you going to do out here!*

Kate also felt different and alone intellectually, as she said in the conversation:

> *Nobody had the same interests as I did really. It was all fluff. If I could find that same kind of friendship with people who weren't afraid to talk about religion or philosophy or anything I would be very happy!*

The economic, social and cultural contexts of Kate's home place had a profound influence

on her learning story. The economic situation was not good. She had always felt different from the people and the culture that surrounded her. Kate gave the sense that feeling different brought about a social isolation which, in part, was self-imposed.

> *I choose not to get involved or I choose to get involved. I will still go and have coffee like I used to, knowing...Well, this week I felt so sad because I had coffee with a friend and we were talking about this group of women that I used to hang around with a lot, and I guess that they had all got together for a supper and they hadn't invited me. I was kind of shocked and then I realized, well, their lives have gone on too. Sometimes people forget that everybody's life goes on. Just because I've been too busy and made other friends so have they. But they kept that other group strong. And I felt really sad. And then I realized that I didn't want to be part of that group any more or couldn't be part of that group any more.*

To complete the picture of Kate's home place are these references to how she felt about herself at the time she began to take university classes. It was no surprise to me that she told me that her self-confidence was low after years of being what she called "a stupid housewife" and "no one paying her for her intelligence". The most touching of these references to her low self-esteem comes from the following quotation. We had just finished talking about the increase in Kate's self-confidence when she experienced success as an adult learner. But she felt intimidated at the same time. It was difficult for her as a new adult student largely because of her lack of confidence. The passage begins with my field notes:

> ***(Quiet resignation. Kind of sad tone, quite striking. Speaks volumes by its tone and delivery.)***

Maybe its not like that for young people. A lot of young people (or maybe they have a lot more confidence) you know they come straight out of high school and right into university. ***Softly spoken almost to herself*** *... you haven't spent years and years losing your self-confidence.*

The depressed economic situation, the social and cultural isolation that she felt, as well as her own state of mind characterize Kate's home place at the point of time when she began her pursuit of a university education.

Perhaps the most significant feature of Kate's home place is the extent to which she felt that living in a rural area limits her learning and life. Merriam and Caffarella (1991) remarked that "the context of adult life and the societal context shape what an adult needs and wants to learn and, to a somewhat lesser extent, when and where learning takes place (p.1)". Doubtless, most experts and theorists in adult education would agree with this statement; however, there is a significant omission in this statement. That omission is impact of the geography of where an adult lives. Geography predisposes any education program that an adult needs or wants as well as when and where learning takes place. Because Kate is a woman living in a rural area, there are limits to her educational and employment opportunities. This fact was thematic throughout Kate's learning experiences. For example, I was astonished at the mountain of courses that she has taken over the past ten years in pursuit of a degree. I commented that it was a remarkable indication of perseverance. In her words:

When I'm finished it will be an incredible story. But you know part-time studies. It can go on forever. I could be done really quickly if I had access. Access to the money- to classes. If I could go to Saskatoon or Yorkton - well, first of all they don't have half

classes in science so that's out. I mean look at that, it's not even a full year of classes left.

In this reference she talked about the barrier of distance.

I can handle the work. But I couldn't handle all the driving. You add two hours every day for driving plus your class then you've got to come home and do all that homework, plus you've got to look after the house and the kids and drive them to volleyball.

I specifically asked Kate about how living in a rural area had affected her. Her response summed up the extent to which living in a rural area imposed on her learning and life.

Everything! For me, everything, everything is affected. It's not only learning but it's the job market AFTER. It's just everything is closed for me. Everything that I would have liked to work at or study is not an option for me. The first list of things that they (employment counsellors) *said that I should study for was almost a joke because of where I live.*

The Point of Departure

The point of departure is a metaphor for describing the motivational factors behind Kate's decision to pursue a university education. Most, if not all of these factors, are tempered by the fact that she lives in rural Saskatchewan.

Kate had a number of reasons for deciding to pursue a university education. As Merriam and Caffarella (1991) remarked there are a "myriad reasons adults give for participating in learning activities" (p.83) and, the reasons "are subject to change" (p.86). Many researchers have clustered these reasons but have noted that individuals can have multiple reasons and that

motivations can change from time to time (Cross, 1981). The clusters of reasons are:

- social relationships as a way to make new friends or meet members of the opposite sex;
- external expectations to comply with an authority such as an employer;
- social welfare stemming from a desire to serve others in their community;
- professional advancement such as job enhancement or professional development;
- escape or stimulation to alleviate boredom or escaping home or work routine;
- cognitive interest or learning for the sake of learning.

Cross (1981) commented that "the reasons people give for learning correspond consistently and logically to the life situations of the respondents " (p. 91). As a motivational factor, Kate's life situation was in large part influenced by external circumstances - the economic, social, cultural character of her home place. But she was also motivated from within as she began to question herself and how she would handle the changes that were coming from the *outside*. Having lived for years as a person who "loved staying at home" with her four children on the farm, Kate said

> *I realized that it was all over - that I was going to be expected to go out into the workforce and it was like panic set in.*

Proponents of perspective and transformative adult learning theories remarked that adult learning is motivated by a critical incident that transforms the perceptions of an adult learner or triggers a response that prompts adults to reflect on the assumptions they have about their lives (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow & Associates, 1990). In Kate's particular circumstances, her way of life as a rural woman staying home with her children was threatened by a depressed farm economy and pressures to find a job.

I believe that these circumstances, and Kate's sense of panic, created the environment for the critical incident that motivated Kate to enrol in a university course. Metaphorically, the critical incident prompted her departure on a learning journey. Specifically, the critical incident that became the point of departure was a result of employment counselling.

Reaching the conclusion that she knew her life was changing, Kate set about to investigate her employment possibilities. Aptitude tests verified what she knew, that she wasn't well-suited to conventional employment, particularly those available in rural areas. At the top of the list were art related activities such as painting and sculpture. Kate faced another reality - what kind of painting- or sculpture-related employment would she find anywhere let alone in a rural area?

> *So, I came out of that really depressed rather than happy which I should have been. I thought about it and thought the second happiest place that I am is in museums - So if I could sit in a museum and make "graphs" I'll be happy for the rest of my life. I'll be happy with the creative part. So I wrote all the museums that were around - I wrote to Saskatoon and Regina and I asked them what kind of education they required with some kind of creative aspect and they wrote back. I got a letter from both of them and they said "anthropology with fine arts."*
>
> *That's why I signed up for anthropology - an academic degree has got to be worth more than a fine arts degree and besides I was open to distance education with an anthropology degree whereas with Fine Arts ...I talked to the people in Regina and at that time you couldn't take Fine Arts off-campus through Regina. I didn't know that you could through Saskatoon at Yorkton. I didn't know that at that time.*

My background reading on rural education had left me with the impression that the most

common reason that motivated rural adults learners was a job goal. This prompted me to ask Kate, "When you started off was it in part because you liked learning? Or was it because you had a job in mind?"

Yes, oh yes. I did have a goal in mind, a job. But after my first class, my first class was an English class and it was a class in writing papers and I love writing papers. It was just wonderful so I signed up for a degree anthropology class. I loved all the classes in anthropology. They really are just the best! I came to believe and I still believe that everybody should study cultural anthropology because our world is changing and it gives you - you're just so much more open minded. It give you more understanding about people in other cultures. It just changes the way that you view the entire world. Two years into it and I was doing really well taking as many classes as I could.

And then all of a sudden, that's when the first cuts in the province started to happen. All of a sudden museums were not being funded any more. And well, the wind was just out of my sails. What was the point in continuing?

She had consciously planned to pursue education with a job goal in mind. Her motivation shifted with funding cuts to museums.

And so, at that point that was when I started to take Fine Arts classes. They just started as electives and I went that first year. I took a painting class out of Regina, a 3D class out of Regina and a drawing class out of Saskatoon at Yorkton.

Kate's triggering events - the panic of losing a way of life, the need to search for a job, and going back to school with a particular goal in mind - created a difficult situation for Kate

because her choices for employment were limited. But why did she choose to pursue a university program? And why her, what about other rural women in similar situations? We know that the cumulative effects of many years of a depressed rural economy and financial pressures were felt by many rural women. For example, statistical evidence from Stabler and Olfert (1992) indicated that rural economic decline and high unemployment rates and increased poverty in rural areas were prevalent during this time. In another example, Butala (1994) painted this picture of the effect of the rural crisis on rural women:

> Women who had always been available to help with farm work at home and to drive kids to after-school activities were suddenly at work in the bank, the credit union, the grocery store, school, hospital or senior citizens' lodge, jobs which might help keep body and soul together, but which had little or nothing to do with self-fulfilment, and which took women away from the satisfaction of spending the day in the midst of natural beauty (p. 175).

It was a perplexing question: why *did* she choose to take university courses? What allowed her to even consider a university degree as a possible solution to her situation? I believe that her choice to take university courses as a solution to her situation was due to her past experiences with university courses, correspondence classes in high school and previous employment. One mitigating past experience was her success at taking correspondence courses in high school. Later, as a young university student straight out of high school, she had had many positive experiences during a year of university in the early 1970's. But like so many other women she quit school to get married and raise a family. She was then exposed to many negative experiences in jobs requiring few skills. As Kate said she just hated them and she knew she would "just die" from boredom if she had to go to work in the drug store or doctor's office.

These experiences - both positive and negative - opened the door for Kate to see university education as a possible solution to her situation. This sentiment is supported by Merriam and Caffarella's (1991) profile of adults who are receptive to learning:

> Those who appear eager and willing to participate in organized learning activities are distinguishable from those who are not by an underlying attitude which sees education as a positive force, to be equated with happiness, and finds in it also a mechanism for solving acute problems. However, . . . the person must be in a situation calling for the solutions of a particular problem. This could mean situations such as obtaining promotion at work, changing jobs or taking on new responsibilities in the family or in the community, or it could refer to the need to learn a new set of work skills, such as might arise in situations like divorce or unemployment (p.83).

Heading Off Down the Road

Kate's original intent in pursuing a university education was to get a job on the basis of an anthropology and/or a fine arts degree. Just as we travel down any road, we may encounter obstacles that we need to overcome. For adult learners such as Kate these obstacles have come to be known collectively as *barriers* (Cross, 1981; Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982). Cross (1981) described four kinds of barriers to formal learning:

- situational barriers which relate to a person's situation at the time;
- dispositional barriers which refer to a person's attitude towards herself and her learning;
- informational barriers which indicate that there is a lack of awareness of educational opportunities;

- and, institutional barriers, which are the result of the management and organization of the educational institution.

Cross (1981) made an additional comment about barriers that complements the findings of this case study. Cross remarked that in spite of the barriers, many adults surmount them and then carry on.

Throughout Kate's learning experiences barriers appeared. She confronted them, reflected on what she should do and then took action. For example, she takes university courses from three universities in order to find courses that are suitable to *her* needs and circumstances such as her schedule, interests, available budget and the distance she can travel to classes. This was how she described her manipulation of taking courses from three different universities and juggling the credit hours, registration and so on.

> *I just go one muddle at a time. Saskatoon...and see by the time I went to Saskatoon I went to Saskatoon and Regina in the same year. Ooh...I remember there used to be a lot of book work and I've eliminated a lot of it. I don't send transcripts anymore. Everybody wanted transcripts from everybody else and I used to think it was my legal obligation to let them know if I was flunking out of one university but hey, I'm not flunking out so I don't send anybody transcripts anymore. I figure it's none of their business. When I finally decide, okay...this year I'm applying for the BFA program in Saskatoon. I've decided so then I will send transcripts then it's important. But even then it's not important to Saskatoon, because I'm going to change it as soon as I graduate from anthropology. See doing two at once is really confusing. Of course some of the credits from the first degree go towards the second degree.*

When queried as to whether the universities were aware of her taking two degrees, she responded:

> *No. They don't know what they're doing. They don't know what I'm doing. I... I'm the one spending the money. It's my business. I know that I'm getting good marks. In the end, I know that its not going to affect anyone other than me and if I take some classes in Saskatoon that they won't accept at Athabasca that's my problem not theirs....and that's how it should be. They're ...they're...they're not the boss of me, kind of thing.*

Although, keeping her credits organized appeared to be a little confusing . . .

> *They'll want to know what one...they want to use... okay if you have a three year degree you can they'll only accept 48 credits towards the other so you can't double up on more than those and if they didn't know about each other you could be using the same credits... you could do two degrees by using the fewer credits. You could do it so...so that's all kept me really confused in a way.*
>
> *But it will, like I will have to take uh, I think, well okay, with the first four year degree I can only transfer 54 credits so I can transfer 54 credits from my first degree into my second... I used to think it was 60, I think with Athabasca it is 60, that they will accept but in Saskatoon I just read last night it's 54.*

Initially, I believe that one of the most significant obstacles to Kate's learning experiences had been what Cross would typify as dispositional barriers - those barriers which refer to a person's attitude towards herself and her learning. For example, Kate confessed that she was intimidated by faculty and she avoided contact as much as possible .

I like Athabasca the best. . . I like the fact that I don't have to have any contact with my professor unless I want to. . . I don't have to have any contact with them unless I'm forced to. I hate the phone quizzes. But I hate the idea. It's almost like talking to a box. It's a real intimidation thing.

In this dialogue Kate talked about her relationship with female instructors and the circumstances that mitigated her intimidation.

Some of the women who have been my professors, I've really enjoyed talking to them once I did get talking to them. Sometimes when I would be talking to some of my tutors you could hear little kids yelling in the background. You'd know that they're working from their own home and they're doing exactly the same as you're doing. The only thing is that they started a few years earlier and were able to move at a little bit faster pace. But there they are, they're teaching from their own home and they're yelling at the kids "Be quiet". I loved it. That part was okay. I'd rather talk to someone in that situation, their home, to be my tutor than someone in an office sounding very professional.

While she did achieve some level of comfort with female instructors, Kate gave me the sense that she might still be intimidated by faculty.

But you know if I went into doing a Masters I would be right back at square one again. I bet I would be intimidated by the whole process and I wouldn't say boo!

Another dispositional barrier or obstacle was where she fits in and why. Feeling different and not fitting into the community often result in a lack of social relationships and feelings of loneliness and isolation. For adult learners the desire for social relationships can be a motivating factor for participation in higher education (Astin, 1993; Cross, 1981; Todd, 1995). Kate

obviously did not seek social relationships when she began to take courses through Athabasca University. Socialization, however, appeared to be why Kate continued to take courses through the University of Saskatchewan out of Yorkton.

> *You don't fit in and that's probably why I've stuck with Saskatoon - in Yorkton because everybody there is like me. That's where I've gotten a lot of friends. That's why I go back. To maintain those contacts with those people. And everybody there in those art classes - the majority - 75% are adult learners, part-time students. People who are driving long distances. People who have kids. People who find that money is really, really tight and are always paying late fees for their classes. That's where I fit in! It's difficult to fit in when everybody else is a full-time student. Part-time students there (in reference to one of the universities) are looked down upon. By everybody because it's not showing "commitment" to the program.*

Sights Along the Way

I have used the term *sights along the way* to imply the variety of learning experiences that Kate encountered throughout the years. Many have applications across other themes; however, I have contained them within this section to provide a collage of experiences which I hope will bring understanding to the reader. In this section, I intend to allow Kate to act as tour guide.

The universities.

One range of experiences that Kate talked about in the interviews were the positive attributes that she found in each of the universities that she is enrolled in. These attributes included course structure, atmosphere, and socialization.

These are some of her reflections on the learning experiences she had with Athabasca University.

The courses are Athabasca are wonderful! The one thing from Athabasca is that you work twice as hard as, maybe three times as hard for any classes from anywhere else. I've always thought that was an inferiority thing on their part (Athabasca's) because they're distance so they make them a little bit tougher. Or maybe, it's the only way that they can evaluate because you can't show up for class. But...they're great, you learn. Which is why I'm still taking them from there. I mean you can go to a class on campus and you can come out with good grades and come out learning nothing and you know that.

I think you can tell from what I've said that I like Athabasca the best - it's the hardest but I like it the best. I like the fact that I don't have to have any contact with my professor unless I want to.

Kate enjoyed the experiences in Yorkton through off-campus courses provided by the Regional College and the University of Saskatchewan. In these classes, socialization became important. At the University of Regina, she enjoyed learning in the old Fine Arts Building. She found the atmosphere stimulating. This comment followed her asking me a rhetorical question on why a new building was needed for Fine Arts.

But we all loved it there. We just loved it. We could go to school and we would have on our oldest clothes. I used to see one woman there who was doing her Masters and we would see her all the time in her overalls and her rubber boots. No one cared

what anyone looked like. Nobody shaved, I think they bathed - at least I hope they did. And it was just great. Now, it will be like a regular campus.

Regina campus for fine arts has got to be one of the most creative environments that there is. Now that they've got a new campus I don't know if it still will be. It's on the main campus and that's going to affect the atmosphere of the whole place.

The faculty.

In general, Kate was pleased with the instruction from faculty although she felt there is a definite difference between male and female instructors. In these passages she indicated that she was more comfortable with female instructors.

But there's a definite difference between male instructors and female instructors. In my academic experience in the Fine Arts I've only had male instructors and they've all been wonderful. I've been very, very lucky with all my professors. I think that what it is that in the beginning a lot of the men that I have had - as soon as I get my papers and find out that I have a male tutor I usually have a few days when I freak out and think - oh God, not this again. You have to prove yourself to them. And I don't know if it's a part-time student thing - I think it's a sex thing.

That would be in every single case whereas with women, they seem to be more willing to accept me, maybe it's because I'm an older student.

Well, as an adult student I've taken all of my academic classes through Athabasca and

that's a totally different thing because even when I start talking to the women, those women went back to school as adult students. They finished their degrees. They got their Master's as adults. One of the things that absolutely did kill me when I would get talking to them - the women, you wouldn't talk to them like a professor, there wasn't any of that. It was almost an equal kind of basis. I mean, different papers that I wrote I had remarks that came back from papers like "I found that really interesting so I'm going out to buy that book." That sort of thing. I really like taking classes from women - from older women who have done the same kind of thing and have had the same kind of experiences. And those are the people that I've gotten my best marks from too.

I think they (female instructors) are more willing to validate the students. I think they are more - all I know is that they have always been - I don't know how to say it, they've always been more accepting. But I know, that if I have a certain instructor that I could write stuff right from the heart and I don't have to make it look like an academic paper.

As Kate matured in her learning and increased her self-confidence, she began to take on a consumer attitude . These sentiments were consistent with the observation from demographer David Foot (1996) that university students in the future will be more consumer-oriented. The following remarks indicate how she felt about poor instruction.

Well, in my sculpting class - I don't think I could call him poor. He just wasn't there. I was pretty pissed off! I never took a sculpting class after that. I looked at the calendar and he's teaching the next level up as well. And so, I just...I just took more drawing and painting. I don't know how many years ago it was that I took sculpting. Sculpting was

*going to be my major . Because I was taking them fast and putting in a lot of effort. I don't think anybody got anything out of it. I was upset with my own work in the class, I was upset with everybody's work in the class. I felt that the work that we all put together was shit and he didn't have the balls to say it. There was just no direction! He was really a nice guy. And what do you do? He was really a nice guy. I still think that if I saw him on the street that he would remember my name and its been a lot of years. And that makes me feel guilty because he was such a *&^* (*awful) *professor.*

I asked Kate what she expected from an instructor and from a class. She replied that she expected both content and feedback. My next question was, "And do you always get what you expect?"

Well, now I do because I ask for it. The content and feedback, both. This painting class that I'm in, the very first class we took our work in and she spent all the time critiquing the first year students stuff which I thought was really below any of the standards in any of the classes that I had ever been in before and dismissing everybody that was 3rd and 4th year. The prof didn't even seem to notice.. . . and I explained that to her and said that I would really appreciate any feedback. And she did. She took me into the hallway afterwards, she had me and a third year student out because I figured she deserved better - she's paying her money too.

I demand it now. It's my right! I'm paying for that! . I said would you mind - I don't say, "after all I'm paying for this"- but I say, I would really appreciate any comments that you have. And I had told her earlier in class that, it was earlier that day because it was the first - a lot of the first year students didn't want to bring their stuff out to be

critiqued. I said no - you have to do it. That's the most important part of art class so she knew that I felt that way. And I mean you don't like it, nobody likes it but it's how you learn. And then you learn what's good and what's bad about what you're doing.

Learning styles.

It was obvious throughout Kate's conversations that she preferred an independent learning style.

I guess what I could say about my experiences in class, except for the art history, I treat every class like a correspondence class. So I mean I work better on my own. I'm not a group person or any thing like that. You know how you' ll see ads and they'll talk about a 'team player' well, I'm not a team player, not a team player.

The instructional approaches which she prefers are through research assignments or writing papers. Memorization and multiple choice exams were definitely not her favourite choices.

A lot of them are multiple choice, that's all memorizing! There are some of the anthropology exams that I have written where people show that they have wonderful senses of humour with their choices. They'll burst out laughing right in the middle of the exam! I do really well in multiple choice because I've really been memorizing! But I'm also a really good forgetter. (Laugh) I walk out of that exam and I have about 12 hours of tension when I'm coming down and then I forget everything. And I realize that I don't LEARN that way. I don't learn that way. I learn - I love to write even though I hate to write the papers. They're so much work but I learn so much from it and that's the stuff

that sticks with me! And it's interesting that's why I like the higher level classes. The ones without the exams - the ones that you get to do major research papers! But at least they're interesting. Youre not just sitting - you know when Im memorizing stuff I sit at the kitchen table, I put my feet up I have a cup of coffee and the key to memorizing is, of course, going over something over and over and over again! And so, I keep the radio on so half of your brain doesnt concentrate on what youre supposed to be memorizing - Its just a trick right? And the other half of your brain is listening to the news or whatever so youre not bored with what youre doing. And you just repeat everything, repetition, repetition, repetition. God, I hate that stuff! I mean...who doesnt?

Everybody learns a different way. I think that going to class and sitting in class are hoops. I think thats - and maybe for a lot more people than me. Its just another hoop that you have to go through. Or, or... I have never heard anybody say that they had to sit in a lecture and learn the material. Ive never heard any body say that. Mostly, people are there because if you miss more than two lectures they lower your mark!

Courses.

Kate spoke of a couple of themes when she talked about courses. First and overarching nearly all of our conversations was her enthusiasm for art whether it was drawing, sculpting, or painting. Being a creative person was an important personal quality for Kate.

Second, she spoke about her love of learning fostered by anthropology classes.

I had a goal in mind, a job. And after - as soon as - okay, my first class was an English class and it was a class in writing papers and I love writing papers. It was just wonderful

so I signed up for a degree anthropology class. I loved all the classes in anthropology. Theyre just the best and I came to believe and I still believe that everybody should study cultural anthropology because our world is changing and it gives you - youre just so much more open minded. It gives you more understanding about people in other cultures. It just changes the way that you view the entire world.

Evaluation.

One last word from Kate on marks which I think indicated her maturation as a student and learner. It also provides insight into Kate's learning, delightful sense of humour and positive outlook. I had just asked her the question, "So what is the meaning of a mark, then?"

Kate: *Nothing. Its just an indicator. Its just an indicator of how well youre doing in that class and I still wonder if some of those profs dont just throw those papers down the stairs. I REALLY LOVE IT WHEN PROFESSORS MARK ON THE RUN!.*

K: *(Laugh)*

Kate: *Dont you like that?*

K: *(Laugh) I dont think Ive had any that have marked on the run!*

Kate: *Oh - Ive gotten papers back that have said, "sorry, Im marking this in such a hurry." I had one professor who kept telling me that. Damn! I had good marks in that class! I figured she didnt have time to be really critical. You know because they look for stuff, if there is a comma out of place here or ... they look for that kind of thing. She didnt have time to nit pick. Actually, I saw her stuff in Discover Magazine a couple of months ago. She was doing some stuff up north - so no wonder she was in a hurry!*

Changes Along the Trail

There is no doubt that heading off down a learning trail brought about changes in Kate's life. But, as Astin (1993) asked, were these changes brought about by the learning experiences, the learner herself, or other influences in her life? For example, if Kate had not been taking courses she would be doing something else which would likely bring changes to her life. Certainly, the aging and increasing independence of her children had an impact.

Kate talked about three areas of change in her life since the time when she began to take university courses. These changes were: increased self-confidence and an acceptance of herself; personal reconciliation with her place in the community, and her future goals. As I listened to Kate describes these changes I became convinced that at the heart of these changes was her ability and courage to reflect critically on her assumptions and beliefs. While critical reflection is a key process in both perspective transformation theory and transformative learning, it would not be appropriate for me to propose that changes were indicative of perspective transformation. Further research would be needed to determine the impact of her learning experiences in relation to what would happen if she did not take courses, if she did something else, or if there were other influences in her life. Nevertheless, these changes are notable.

Changes in self-perception.

Nearly ten years ago Kate went back to school to embark on a university education. At that time, she said that she had spent years losing her self-confidence. These are some of the ways that Kate talked about herself in her current situation.

On art she said:

> *Everybody starts out questioning if they have any talent not realizing that talent is only a small part of it. Hard work is a large part of it. And, that means looking at things in a different way - believing in yourself. Thats the key. All you have to do is walk through the art galleries and see who is selling what and after a couple of years it changes the way you look at things. Art is where I should have been in the first place.*

She used her art as a metaphor in this example to describe herself - acknowledging and accepting that she makes things difficult for herself.

> *A friend said that I make art way harder than it should be. I thought about that. The last time I saw her I explained that art was a part of who I was and so my art has been that way. Art has been very hard for me in a lot of ways. I have wanted more that it be more technically correct, you know, academically correct. I dont care about likeness or having it look like the person, thats a bonus, its the academic stuff, the strokes, the way its applied, its all the things that most people dont even see that are important to me.*

Kate's self-perception of her intellectual ability has also changed over the course of ten years. She characterized the changes in her intellectual ability in this passage:

> *Ive learned how to write papers really well, Ive learned how to express myself reasonably well so that I can pretty much win any argument that I feel like. And, uh...punctuation! And what else have I learned? Ive learned lots of things about cultures. I mean thats changed by life. It has changed my life - I think Im a different person. Just the way I look at different people. And thats the important thing! And the ability to express myself.*

Lastly, a change in self-worth as indicated in this example.

Well, I used to be really, really depressed because I used to feel like I had to go out and work and contribute to the family and that sort of thing. But over the years, Ive come to accept that Im really good at what Im doing. . .

Personal reconciliation with her community.

I believe that a good deal of Kate's initial reflection and change was prompted by not fitting into her community. Rural communities are more homogeneous than urban communities which makes being different a very large burden. In Kate's situation she chose to be different and stand apart from the crowd. I felt this was a reconciliation of sorts because she had come to terms with her isolation. She described this reconciliation by saying that even though she still felt sorry about not being part of a big crowd anymore, she recognized that it was her choice to take part or isolate herself. *"I just feel like sometimes Im missing out on something and yet deep down I know that Im not."*

Future aspirations.

Kate began her university education with a job goal in mind. But her access to appropriate university courses was limited and there were very few job prospects. Because of this situation, she had to modify her aspirations by manipulating her learning life and her employment opportunities to fit with the reality of her rural situation.

So thats what I like to do. What else would I do? Id be back working in a drug store if I quit taking university classes. Because theres no jobs around here. Ill bet there is nothing within 60 miles that I am suited for. Nothing. My goal now is that by the time

Brett graduates I will be a full-time artist with my own studio. Thats my goal.

When you look at it in a different way, Im doing what they said - Im just doing it in a different way. Because you see, the first five things were all in the area of art. And when I first looked at it I said, well, theres no money to be made in art. Theres no future in art. But I changed that. I mean I didnt change that - I changed my thinking about that.

What Lies Ahead?

Using Kate's words I hope that I have conveyed an understanding of her life and her learning experiences. These are the past and the present. But what about the future - what did Kate talk about when she looked ahead? Two themes emerged when she talked about the future: her continuing to learn and her aspiration that her children continue to learn.

Many times I heard Kate's comments on why she wants to continue learning. She said:

Its like these damn classes. Intellectually Im going - you know one more class I could have my degree out of Athabasca and I could go on to study Fine Arts. But my gut feeling is no, every single class that Ive ever taken Ive learned something really, really important, either about the world or about myself. I love that! I love feeling that way. So Im going with my gut feeling. But I keep telling myself - and soon as Im finished this class if Im forced to I can always graduate. I can always just graduate.

Kate's aspirations for her children to continue to learn were embedded in nearly every conversation we had. From those incidental, daily life experiences that Kate described to me, I sensed a deep commitment to her goal of fostering a learning attitude in her children. A large part

of Kate's learning life involved passing on her commitment to learning on to her children.

None of them cared a thing about art, or uh, none of them understood the way that I was raising my kids. I wanted. . . Because if you come from that thing where you feel that you could have done more with my life you kind of make sure that your kids are focussing.

I want all my kids to get a degree. I want them all to go to university. I want them all to have that experience but thats because I think in the end what it does do - if youve done your "homework" it does change you as a person. It opens your mind. It broadens the way you think about everything. Each class that I take I become a different person. And I know that. I think I become a better person. I think you become a better person in all kinds of ways. And I hope that the same will be true for my kids that they become more accepting of other people. Its hard to be judgemental - its just more difficult as you know more about things.

Closing

I stated in Chapter I that the purpose of this case study was the search for a reconciliation of my experiences as a rural adult learner and the knowledge that I had about universities, rural areas and adults as learners. I sought this reconciliation through understanding Kate's learning experiences.

Certainly as I wandered through the trails and paths of Kate's learning experiences, the fundamental nature of her learning emerged. From this nature I began to understand more about my own experiences. But as I searched Kate's learning experiences as a rural adult learner for a

reconciliation with university policies and practices I found instead new contradictions and more questions. In the next chapter I will discuss both the fundamental nature of Kate's learning experiences and these contradictions and questions of university education. Recommendations follow the discussion.

Most scientists believe their entire process is objective, but Einstein has placed the first critical step right where it belongs, in the tangled garden of human personality.

Don Gayton, (1990). The wheatgrass mechanism: Science and imagination in the western Canadian Landscape, p. 12.

Chapter V. Discussion

Searching for Reconciliation in a Tangled Garden

Referring to the questions that researchers pursue through qualitative research, Glesne and Peshkin (1990) stated that "the things that we have seen and heard about the people and circumstances of interest to us therefore become the "irritants" around which we construct our questions" (p.65). The people and circumstances of my interest (in other words, my search for reconciliation) are rural adult learners and universities . In this final chapter of the case study I present a discussion of my search for reconciliation with the caveat that, by necessity, I have confined it to the context of Kate's learning experiences, specifically the fundamental nature of her learning and the contradictions and questions as they pertain to university policies and practices. Even within these boundaries, adult learners, rural Saskatchewan and universities exist in a complex and tangled garden.

Multiplicity and Variety of Kate's Learning

In Chapter IV, using a metaphor of trails and paths, I presented and organized the data across themes that described Kate's learning experiences. Author Gretel Ehrlich expressed this sentiment of landscape that I believe is metaphoric of these experiences as well as my receptivity

to learn from them:

> I like to think of landscape not as a fixed place, but as a path that is unwinding before my eyes, under my feet. To see and know a place is a contemplative act. It means emptying our minds and letting what is there, in all its multiplicity and endless variety, come in (Least Heat-Moon, 1991, p.5).

In the first section of this chapter, I present the fundamental nature of these experiences in all their multiplicity and variety. As I do so, it is important for readers to keep *ruralness* in mind as an underlying part of the framework for this discussion.

The context of rural Saskatchewan.

> *October 3 - My Mom's birthday.*
> *Another interview with Kate. We met again at her parents' cottage. What a beautiful spot. It was just magic in the valley - my favourite place of course. One thing that's been quite clear in all of this is that you can't quite separate Kate from the context of where she lives - a rural area. Even though she doesn't mention it a lot she does live in a rather isolated spot. The neighbours aren't really close. You see her personality everywhere, it's all around in the house, the yard, the art and crafty stuff. I wonder if its because she studies and works at home alone on the farm or down here in the valley. It seems to me that living in a rural area is a huge part of what makes her tick.*
> Field notes after fourth interview

There is no separating the rural context of Kate's learning experiences. The literature on adult education referred to this as the context, the sociocultural setting or life circumstances. Regardless of the label, the traditions of rural Saskatchewan permeated Kate's learning and her learning experiences. The barriers she faced, the attitudes she had about herself and her learning, the support or lack thereof, her family, everything is embedded in rural sociocultural patterns.

Therefore, as I present the fundamental nature of Kate's learning, that sense of *being rural* is a thread that runs throughout these various themes.

The rural ethic.

Kate's perseverance to a learning life despite numerous barriers is remarkable. As she said, "I won't quit. I simply don't give up". These words complement the findings in the literature that attributes of independence, tenacity and self-reliance prevail in rural areas (Barker, 1985; Tilburg & Moore, 1985). Our agrarian roots in Saskatchewan foster the unique characteristics, attitudes, values, and motivations of rural areas that motivate our sense of cooperation, perseverance, voluntarism and social democracy.

Losing a way of life.

My first interview with Kate was in the kitchen of her house. Dressed in jeans, she sat with one knee pulled up on the chair, the other leg swinging. She looked younger than her age. She spoke of the great dismay she felt when she knew her life as a full-time homemaker "was all over." She would have to find a job, but the possibility of finding fulfilling employment in her local rural area was virtually nil.

Kate loved her life as a full-time mom living on a farm in rural Saskatchewan. She enjoyed being at home with her children, being creative, cooking and looking after her family. Changes in the financial situation of the farm and the resulting pressure to help support the family came as a devastating blow to Kate. The way of life that she had chosen was rapidly disappearing.

This time, the decade of the 80's and on into the 90's was a difficult one for farm families. Not only was the farm economy severely depressed but the farm family as a unit had changed in ways that we are only now beginning to realize. Some speculate that these times signalled the end of the family farm (Stabler & Olfert, 1992).

It wasn't just that farmers lost land (although that was real pain and real suffering), it was the loss of generations of knowledge, tradition and a way of life *chosen* by farm families. If you lived in Saskatchewan in the late 1980s, you were certainly aware of the situation. Farm rallies, news stories, economic studies told of the problems but very few looked at this "decade of rural decline" (Stabler and Olfert, 1992) with the view of what it *meant* and *continues* to mean to farm women.

Nothing was the same as it had been, and it was not by choice. As Kate said, she knew that the way of life that she wanted and enjoyed was all over and that she would have to do something different. She, like hundreds, perhaps thousands of farm women, knew that their rural way of life would be changed in ways they could neither predict nor want.

Confirmation of self.

September 28, 1996
I think one of the things that I need to do is remind Kate that her experiences, her very own experiences that she felt, that she thought about are really, really important. I think that right at the moment she's not sure that they are. Does it come back to her own sense of self worth not being what it might be? Maybe part of it is....I've read that women with low self-esteem, when they do something well, shrug it off, excusing the accomplishment like its no big deal kind of thing. Whereas, if you have higher self-esteem it is a big deal. And her reluctance to talk about that. It's odd that she talked about hiding her university books.

Field notes after second interview

In the rural area where Kate lives nearly everything is focused on agriculture, including social and cultural activities. But there is a more pervasive nature of agriculture - one that runs distinctly along women's and men's roles. Women look after children and the *books*. Men perform the physical, and seemingly more important activity of farming. And in rural areas, the farm takes priority.

Being the mother of four active children, "sewing their clothes, baking bread, canning, raising chickens" and so on meant that she took less for herself and gave more to others. Her education was for herself. Over these years she has received many questions about her learning ranging from "Why aren't you finished" to "When you fail you can always do something else."

Kate needed a confirmation of herself as an intelligent, participating individual. She wanted acknowledgement of her intellectual abilities and intelligence. In her words, "No one was paying me to think", or "People thought I was just a stupid housewife."

Through her course work and her high academic achievement she received confirmation of her abilities. In turn, these achievements began a process of self-acceptance. A large part of this self-acceptance was that she gave herself permission to be different.

Even though Kate is developing a confirmation of herself, she told me that she often felt intimidated by instructors. For example, she spoke of carrying the notion that she ought not to be "disrespectful" to faculty in class.

She was making progress however. She described her academic and personal skills and weaknesses with confidence. She began to both demand and receive information from instructors in classes. She also mapped out her learning path with greater confidence than before. In these

ways, I believed that she was taking actions that emerged from her reflecting critically on her learning.

Wanting validation of her life experiences.

One of the basic principles of adult education is that adult learners bring a vast resource of life experiences to their learning. These life experiences are as important to Kate as they are to other adults. In Kate's situation she wanted *validation* that her personal experiences had meaning. Kate was and is *a stay at home mother* - a role she enjoyed but one that she felt lacked recognition for its value from others. In one conversation she told me about feeling uncomfortable in a situation with another woman who was a "professional woman." In that situation Kate asked herself, " What does that make me - a hillbilly?"

> *January 5, 1997*
> *Kate has been talking about her relationship with her female tutors at Athabasca. Her comments were poignant. It's as if Kate felt like there's a voice at the end who understands and who is lonely and isolated in the same way that she is. The feeling of isolation keeps running through Kate's conversations. Physical, emotional and intellectual isolation. This really tugs at my heart as I sit here transcribing these notes. I too, have keenly felt the physical, emotional and intellectual isolation. Driving home late at night from class, missing the kids more than the world will know. Wondering why am I doing this? Who cares? And if not even the professor or instructor cares how do you keep going? Who do you talk to? There's no coffee talk, no meeting after class, no group discussions that aren't totally out of your way to make.*
>
> Field notes

Kate first began to feel validation of her life experiences when in contact with female instructors. Often when she spoke with her female tutors from Athabasca University she could hear children in the background. She could identify with the tutors because they were in the same

situation as she was. The female instructors in similar life situations reassured Kate that her goal of a university education was possible. In her words, "these tutors are just like me except that they started school a few years earlier." She felt even better as a from the maturing student and as a woman when a female instructor encouraged her to "write from the heart."

Kate talked about receiving more than emotional support from female instructors. She told about a key experience when she was writing a paper for a research class in anthropology. She had selected the topic of native healing and had proposed to research the information with an elder living on the nearby reserve. The elder agreed to provide the sacred knowledge to her for a price of $200. She was disillusioned and became even more so when she discovered a non-native member of the clergy who gave her the information at no cost. She thought that *she* had failed, that it was her fault. She felt that she could not write about the experience because she had made an error. The proposed assignment was not handed in. Eventually, the female tutor called her and asked for the assignment. Kate explained the situation and was quite astonished when the tutor encouraged her to write about the experience of those events rather than what had been proposed originally. It was a notable experience for Kate because the tutor had signaled that Kate's own experience was important. It also served as a symbol to Kate that her learning and her academic abilities had reached a level of maturity.

As Kate's confidence grew she began to validate her own experiences and knowledge. Originally, she was awed by the subject content of cultural anthropology. She later began to question what these professors really knew - describing the theories of experts as "mythology." She approached courses differently, demanding and receiving information, content and opinion. Through her art work and in the processes of her writing for her courses she used and applauded

her life experiences, saying that younger students had "nothing to write about, nothing to paint about" because they did not have the rich bank of life experiences that she had.

Sharing her knowledge and experience.

Throughout our conversations, Kate continually displayed that she is a very sharing person. She described how she shared her knowledge and experience with other rural learners in similar situations. In one example, she talked of trying to help another rural woman work through the red tape of applying for entrance at a university. She spent hours working with other students, passing on what she referred to as "tricks" of working the system.

A large part of her sharing can be attributed to her love of learning and her desire to pass that enthusiasm on to others. Kate commented on more than one occasion that, "learning changed my life" and wanted to encourage others to have the same experience. During the course of our interviews she was in the process of encouraging a friend to take an art course with her.

She also shared her knowledge of universities with other parents whose children were setting off to university. She spoke of people seeking her advice and the effort she had put into telling parents how students should look at the course requirements, the times of the classes, the professors, and life in residence. She cheerfully passed on any information she could to make the lives of the students and their parents somewhat easier as they prepared for university life.

She wanted to share her love of learning and creativity with her children. Part of this stems from her commitment to have each of her children go to university. Her oldest son is in

second year university. She mentioned several times how she could pass on information and advice about how to handle the workload, how to keep asking and demanding questions and being noticed.

Dimensions of Kate's isolation.

November 11, 1996
Reviewing Kate's tapes. Trying to get this .....transcribing done. Looking for that cat in the tree. Kate spends a lot of time talking about the substance of her classes, particularly art. It's as if she's just longing to share the content, become involved in intellectual/academic conversations - it's like she's lonely and looking for someone to talk to about this stuff and she thinks that I may be someone, that she can talk "university to."

Field notes

Kate was generous with her time and spirit. But she wanted something in return. She longed to share her interests with others through intelligent discussion and reflection. Several times she told me how she really wanted to have a community of people to talk to about "intellectual stuff" but she knew only one woman in her community who was interested. Not only is learning richer when it is shared with others but its labour tends to be lessened when it is diffused with others - a burden shared by many or a bond of mutual complaint. Pursuing a learning life in a rural area is lonely. In many ways it becomes a self-imposed isolation. The interactions of adult rural life - family, community and farming - leave very little room for intellectual pursuits and learning becomes an individual solitary process. Not only is Kate's isolation a physical entity, it is also a cultural and social phenomenon.

But Kate's isolation is multi-faceted. It acted as a motivating factor, a limiting factor, a refuge and a personal choice.

Physical isolation as a motivating factor urged Kate to seek changes in her life either by finding a job or returning to school. Physical isolation also brought her into contact with fellow adult learners in off-campus art classes - a place that she knew was where she belonged, developed friendships and shared learning experiences. Coulter (1989), who offered a feminist perspective of distance education, commented that rural isolation is particularly difficult for women. She remarked that the concept of distance education courses, that is learning on one's own, exacerbates the problem of isolation for women.

But physical and intellectual isolation also limited Kate. She often felt out of place with her friends, removed and distanced from the pattern of old friendships. Her studies kept her physically isolated at home on the farm. Furthermore, her expanded awareness, particularly through the courses in cultural anthropology, intensified intellectual isolation.

Isolation was also a refuge and a personal choice. As she began to re-establish herself as a person and student, her isolation was self-imposed. She preferred not to speak with tutors. She wanted no human contact and she left me with no doubt that it was her choice. She also talked of the pleasure she derived from books and learning alone at her kitchen table late at night so that learning became a personal refuge for her. Tilburg and Moore (1985) identified the notion of isolation is often a preferred choice of many rural adults learners. The research they examined indicated that many rural adults preferred not to interact with other adults and that socialization was not something that they sought.

Two degrees - two perspectives.

September 15, 1996
Here are some of the questions that I would like to ask Kate. She says she's continuing her pursuit of both programs, Athabasca and the Bachelor of Fine Arts. And one of the things that she said was that the BFA helps with the creativity and the anthropology helps with the academic part of her mind. It seems a little unusual to have both going on at the same time. My questions are these: How is it that she still wants to continue with both areas?...NO that's not a very good question! Scratch that. It's not unusual at all - she's just doing them at the same time, when and where she can get classes!
Field notes

Kate's learning experiences came from three universities, with the intention of finishing two degrees: Anthropology and Fine Arts. The distinctions she made between the two degrees was insightful.

Kate described a degree in anthropology as being "more academic" and "worth more" than a degree in fine arts. From a purely monetary perspective, Kate's conclusions are in agreement with West's (1988) analysis of higher education prepared for the Fraser Institute. He ranked a fine arts degree as the poorest investment in time and money in relation to future job prospects. [1] While West is dismissive of this poor investment, other forecasters (e.g. Clough, 1992; Foot, 1996; Fraser, 1992; Stone & Fletcher, 1992) predict that intellectual leisure pursuits such as fine arts courses are likely to be in demand as the population ages.

Kate would have preferred to take art courses. However, not only did she think that an anthropology degree would be worth more, her access to fine arts courses was very limited. Originally, fine arts courses were not available to her from a distance. Even when they did become available, program and course requirements were either impractical to achieve from a

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[1] Interestingly, a study by Guppy and Pendakur (1989) on the effects of gender and parental education showed children of parents with fine arts degrees were among the most likely groups to participate in post-secondary education.

distance or insensitive to her rural situation.

The high costs of learning.

Rural women and their interests are usually at the bottom of the farm family's list of priorities . During critical times of the year, seeding, harvesting, and calving, the farm comes first no matter what. Men's work is important and inflexible; women's work can be changed and is not considered critical to the farm operation. A rural woman's personal interest must fit around the family or the farm. As Butala (1994) said,

> And the rural, traditional life means that women work all day long for the sake of other people - people they love, it's true, and whose happiness is their happiness - and have to steal any time for themselves for activities not a part of homemaking. Because genuinely free time is in such short supply, there isn't time for an individual woman to search out and learn about what would be a fully satisfying activity for her, if it were possible to find such activities within her geographic range (p. 163).

When Kate talked about the time she spent studying or working on her papers, it was "late at night when everyone was in bed" or "when the kids were at school." She had feelings of guilt about driving to night classes when the kids were home alone and she made sure that no one in her family suffered because she was taking classes.

No one in her family knew, for example, that I had chosen to study her learning experiences as a tribute to herself and her perseverance. She told no one, and our interviews were scheduled into a time that did not interfere with their lives - either her husband's or her children's.

She talked of people dismissing or ignoring her studying as a legitimate and worthwhile

pursuit. She felt that there was certainly a lack of appreciation of the importance of a formal education and a complete lack of recognition of how difficult it is to learn by yourself.

Her burden of guilt came through as she spoke of not letting her university courses interfere with her children. She took her books to the beach, the skating rink or to any number of the kids' activities so that they would not suffer because she was taking classes. Fitting her learning around the work and lives of everyone else is one reason it has taken her a long time to finish her degree.

She alone paid the costs of learning. She took sole ownership of her education and her learning. It could never interfere with the family or become a shared burden. She slid her learning into her family life with minimal disturbances to anyone else.

Perspectives on authority and expert opinions.

Kate's experiences provided some perspectives on authority and expert opinions. A predominant theme in Kate's early learning experiences was that she initially felt intimidated by faculty considering them to be authority figures. Her level of intimidation appeared to decrease somewhat with female faculty, where she found more compassion and a sense of shared experiences. Eventually, as she was exposed to more courses she developed a modest level of comfort with the student/faculty relationship. Yet, even with this increased exposure and her maturation as a student and as an adult woman, she claimed that she was still intimidated by faculty.

In spite of being intimidated, Kate came to question what some of the experts really did know about a subject area. She commented on theories that she had learned early on in her

anthropology courses that were now being disputed by a new generation of experts. She questioned *what* any of the experts "really did know" referring to all their theories as "mythology".

These two sides of the coin on authority and expert opinions appeared to me to be a *work in progress*, a maturation of her learning. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) provided this insight.

> When women accept the responsibility for evaluating and continually reevaluating their assumptions about knowledge, the attention and respect that they might once have awarded to the expert is transformed. They appreciate expertise but back away from designating anyone an "expert" without qualifying themselves (p.139).

Passing along a tradition.

Kate's learning experiences were checkered with her references to family, primarily her children. She spoke minimally about her husband - his role and support of her appeared to be negligible. Other references to her family were that she was very close to her sisters and cousins and that her mother, as a creative and free-spirited person, had a profound influence on her.

In one interesting conversation we had, Kate told me she was sorry her family did not have any sense of tradition in the same way that other cultures had. She cited traditions such as rituals, ceremonies, a strong sense of the past. I found that an odd statement given the *ruralness* of her situation and the traditions that were bound up in the rural subculture.

I have thought about her comments often since that bit of conversation. Kate was determined to pass on to her children a positive reinforcement and role model for pursuing an

education. Whether this counts as tradition in Kate's mind may be questionable, but her continual desire and her deliberate work toward this goal implied that she was passing along a learning tradition to her children.

Developing this kind of attitude is not easy in rural areas. Kate commented that people in her community were more interested in the popularity of their children than in their education. Butala's (1994) observations speak to Kate's situation:

> This was a world which at first appeared to me to nearly all working class, where education wasn't particularly valued since you could be a well-educated bad farmer or a poorly educated top-notch farmer, where differences in jobs were minimal, and where having leisure time wasn't especially desirable (p.31).

Both sides of emotions - sadness and laughter.

Kate's story revealed the fundamental nature of emotion - sadness and laughter, although for most of our conversations the scales were tipped toward laughter. She spoke with regret when she talked about not making more of herself when she was younger. Her youthful expectations were now replaced now by feelings of intellectual, physical and social isolation and a loss in self-confidence.

Yet she was never far from being able to laugh. She talked about her youngest daughter's latest escapades or having to shave her son's head. When she described most incidents relating to her courses she usually saw the humour in situations that might well be an obstacle to others. She often cited confusion and annoyances with rules and regulations at the universities. She told me of a friend of hers, a woman in her late 40's who was applying for admission to college. This

woman had been asked by the university to provide the transcripts of her marks from a hairdressing course that she had taken nearly 30 years ago. As Kate said, "It's not like she's studying brain surgery !"

Finding her own reality.

Finding our own reality means making sense of our experiences. Kate found her own reality in her art. Her art is how she makes sense of her experiences and her reality. As Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) discovered, women find their own voice for their individual reality. I believe that Kate used her art as her voice. "Art", she said, "is where I should have been in the first place."

At the last session of our interviews, Kate told me she had just called herself an *artist* for the first time. This declaration frightened her - she had put into words what she really wanted to be! She spoke as if it were a revelation or a hidden secret that she now felt comfortable to tell. Or perhaps, it was a declaration of a re-birth of her youthful expectations. For whatever the reason, it was a sense of discovery of her own reality. Butala (1994) told of a similar discovery.

> I longed to belong, but without realizing it I was resisting. Although I hadn't yet figured it out rationally and was acting strictly from the gut, I had enough presence of mind in this case to follow my intuition which said that there was no choice involved; belonging would have to be on my own terms, whatever I might finally discover those terms to be (p. 32).

I believe, through her education Kate has and will continue to discover the terms of her life - her own reality of what she wants to be and what she wants to do.

A Perspective of the Tangled Garden of Universities

I admitted in the introduction of this study that I have a fascination with universities and their unique inter-related functions of research, education and community or public service. I am particularly interested in the ways in which universities could and should manifest these functions in rural areas particularly as it affects the individual - the end-user of education. I am still fascinated and I still remain committed to rural areas, and the individual rural adult learner.

But as I wrote and rewrote this narrative of Kate's learning experiences, I had to be reminded time and again from my advisors that I needed to tone down my technical governmental voice. This advice was not only practical - it was significant. It was a reminder to me not to duck under the covers of bureaucratic jargon but to present Kate's experiences and how they relate to the policies and practices of universities. I needed to use imagery to visualize the centrality of the experiences of this individual, spiralling inward to Kate and outward to the universities, up and down from Kate's farm to the larger rural society and back again, as the inductive process of qualitative research and narrative writing evolved.

In this way, I present for contemplation the major themes of Kate's experiences as an individual rural adult learner experiencing the policies and practices of universities. Metaphorically speaking, these themes are found in the tangled garden of the individual, rural areas and the universities, and are part of my search for reconciliation.

Holding high the desire for a university education.

The most powerful motivation behind Kate's learning experiences is the value that she places on a university education. Education from another institution was something that Kate

never even considered. She believed that a university education was the pinnacle, the top of the heap. On one occasion I asked her why she had chosen to take university courses rather than more short-term, technical or human interest classes that were often held locally. Because she wanted the best she said. To Kate this meant the best academic experience, the best instructors and the best program. There was never any question in Kate's mind if this assumption was correct. To Kate there was simply no equal to a university education.

Kate had a commitment to a university education that enabled her to surmount any barrier. Distance, time, cost, family pressures were inconveniences that she worked around for the sake of her learning. As Cross (1981) pointed out, lack of interest is the most major barrier to an adult's learning. Kate definitely had the interest as well as the commitment!

Kate also believed that a university education had the most value for living life. A university education, Kate said, "changes the way you think. You become a better person." The commitment to a university education was one that she purposefully promoted with her children. "I want all my kids to go to university. It's just the best," she said.

The significance of writing, reading and reflection to adult learning.

Kate talked often about the way that she learned the best: writing, reading, reflection and writing again. As Kate said, she loved writing papers and learned the most from them even though they were "the most work". Kate's learning in this way is upheld by van Manen (1990) who said that "writing fixes thought on paper" (p.125). This *learning style* is in contrast to many of her exams, usually anthropology exams, which were multiple choice. She prepared for these exams by memorization. But, she said, "I didn't learn anything. I'm a good memorizer, but I'm

also a good forgetter. Twenty-four hours after the exam, poof, what I learned is all gone!"

Students as clients of the university: mistaking complacency as satisfaction.

The combination of Kate's maturity as a student and her demand for service as a fee-paying adult client became evident in many of the incidents that Kate described. While she was often intimidated by academic staff, she appeared to have none of those same feelings toward administration. On more than one occasion she described demands from university administrations that by her accounts were ridiculous. Citing examples from her son and other adult learners, she talked about the frustration of ridiculous entrance requirements (such as a hairdressing certificate from the 70's), scheduling problems and phone-in registration. She virtually thumbed her nose at the system, for example, being registered and taking courses from three universities at the same. "It's my business," she said, "It's my money. I've got good marks. Why should they care?"

As she matured as a student, she began to expect quality in the courses that she took. One more than one occasion, she referred to courses that she felt were a waste of her time and money. Gradually, she became more assertive in seeking out the instructors for their input. While she was intimidated by faculty - at least at the onset of any course - she refrained from taking any of her complaints to a higher level even when though her expectations and demands went unanswered.

To on-lookers Kate's complacency might be viewed as *client* satisfaction when in reality the opposite was true on more than one occasion. Kate, like so many other adult learners, needed to concentrate her energies on juggling family, financial and time pressures in addition to

her studies. Ultimately, this diminished much of her zeal for demanding quality in university courses and she developed the attitude of jumping through the hoops of course requirements.

Accessibility and the issue of credit transfer .

Kate registered and took courses from three universities. Certainly it is a complicated way of doing things but there is a simple explanation. She took courses when and where she could get them while trying to adhere to the program requirements. Often times, the program requirements, such as access to a lab, were impossible for her to meet. Other times, scheduling and the sequencing of courses became problems. When she was unable to take a course that she needed from one university, she took it from another. As she went about taking courses, she kept her eye on the program requirements for a degree and was convinced that courses from one institution would be accepted by another at least for some credit.

Currently, credit transfer of courses in order to meet the requirements of a degree is the most persistent administrative problem Kate faces. When we last spoke (as part of the process of the verification of the research data) Kate told me that even though she wanted to graduate with a Fine Arts Degree from the University of Regina, it appeared unlikely as the Faculty of Fine Arts would not accept some of the courses that she had taken at Yorkton from the University of Saskatchewan.

My Search for Reconciliation: Concluding Remarks

I reviewed the literature in these areas: universities, adult learning, rural Saskatchewan and rural adult education. The discussion on universities concentrated on their role in meeting

society's needs, particularly of adult learners. I followed this section by describing a theoretical background of adult learners. Underlying these theories is the notion that the individual and his or her particular situational context as well as personal learning needs are germane to any theory of adult learning.

Using this understanding of the centrality of the individual in adult education I examined the particular sociocultural aspects of this case study - the context of rural Saskatchewan during the last decade and the nature of rural adult education. Spurred on by rural depopulation and the recent economic recession in rural Saskatchewan, post-secondary education for rural adults received public and governmental interest as a means to meet the societal needs of rural areas. This interest was and will likely continue to be linked to economic development and rural rejuvenation.

I began this study as a search for reconciliation between what I had learned about the policies and practices of universities, what I saw all around me in rural Saskatchewan and my personal experiences as a rural adult learner. I also considered how universities could and should manifest their unique functions of research, education and community service in rural areas, using Kate's experiences as well as my own.

In many ways, I found a measure of reconciliation through the interpretation of Kate's experiences many of which were similar to my own. I did not find the same degree of reconciliation with university policies and practices and their connection with rural Saskatchewan. Kate's experiences of nearly ten years of university courses from three separate institutions more often provoked new contradictions and reinforced old perplexities. Some of these have been presented as recommendations for practice and research which follow at the end of this chapter. I

present the others - education from a distance, the differences between rural and urban adult learners, and the community needs of rural areas and - for further contemplation.

Education from a distance is not distance education.

A contradiction in terminology comes from the distinction between *education from a distance* and *distance education.* Distance education is the collective term for the educational projects and technology designed to deliver instruction usually at a distance and in the absence of an instructor. Education from a distance describes all the attributes of an education while living at a distance. It includes all the ways that learners use to pursue an education at a distance: on-campus, off-campus and distance education courses. Education from a distance subsumes distance education. The contradiction erupts when distance education technologies are considered a replacement for an education from a distance.

Rural adult learners are not like urban adult learners.

The literature that I reviewed as part of this case study looked at one of the primary functions of universities - specifically, meeting the needs of society. In Saskatchewan, an important constituent of our society is the individual rural adult learner. Included in this discussion was the concept that there are differences between urban and rural adult learners. These differences are primarily in the areas of barriers to learning but also include particular dispositional characteristics unique to the rural subculture. In other words, family and community involvement and activities on the farm often take priority over studying. This often means that rural adult learners have less time to devote to pursuing an education. This fact, coupled with the

barrier of distance, lack of access to facilities and available counselling results in a different set of learning circumstances for rural learners.

Where are the universities in rural Saskatchewan?

The time frame of this study takes place during a difficult time for rural Saskatchewan. Confronted by the farm crisis, rural depopulation and an economic recession in rural Saskatchewan, government and rural residents looked for ways to improve the situation. Having witnessed the decline of rural Saskatchewan and personally experiencing the farm crisis, I often asked the question: "What are the universities doing to help us through this?"

In a similar way, as I learned about Kate's experiences, I looked for the visibility of universities in rural areas. I found very little indication of them.

This same question - "where are the universities?" - might just as easily come from other groups in rural areas: First Nations and Métis populations, immigrants to rural areas and the elderly. I believe that high rates of rural unemployment and poverty, lagging economic development and unique social problems are community needs that direct our universities to concentrate a portion of their inter-related functions of research, education and community service. In other words, their presence should be known to all residents not only those who live in university centres.

Recommendations.

I have included a number of recommendations based on the findings of this case study as well as my own background in education as public policy. As I indicated earlier, this is my answer

to some of the contradictions and perplexities raised in the course of this case study.

Changes to government policies.

There is a long-standing policy of non-interference by government in the academic matters of the university. However, as the gatekeeper of public funds to Saskatchewan's two universities, government has an obligation to public accountability. Government policies should encourage collaboration among institutions. Courses and degree programs from all providers in a geographic area should be organized to provide reasonable access to assist rural adult learners in becoming aware of educational offerings. Encouraging credit transfer between institutions should be a priority.

Practices and policies of universities.

The trend of adult learners in university education will continue to include those from rural areas in Saskatchewan. Changing corporate structures, advances in technologies and the increasing advances of a knowledge-based society are reasons why adults will need to learn throughout their lives (Foot, 1996; Fraser, 1992; Thornton and Harold, 1992). There will be challenges, however, for universities to adapt their policies, procedures and teaching methods for an older clientele (Campbell, 1995; Clough, 1992; Confederation College, 1988; Foot, 1996). Course content or program requirements should be revised to reflect relevant learning experiences for adults. A consumer-oriented attitude to the students as clients should be adopted by universities or they stand to miss the anticipated resurgence (and much needed revenue) of adult learners.

Saskatchewan is a province of rural and urban cultures. There are inherent differences in these cultures which should be acknowledged by our province's universities. With this in mind, universities should determine how they will meet the teaching, research and societal needs of rural areas including the special interest groups that also live in these areas. They should be flexible and open in assisting rural residents in pursuing an education from a distance.

Program requirements should meet the needs of the individual student rather than the needs of the institution. Adults living in rural areas are creative, resourceful, self-reliant and have a high energy level. Individual resourcefulness creates independence, which must be dealt with in the methods and delivery systems employed by adult educators. Careful situational assessment can aid in the presentation of educational programming that will encourage individuals to work together without displaying their needs as weaknesses. The model of an *open university* should be considered to meet the rural adult needs for learning and educational access.

Faculty should be instructed in adult learning theory and practice. In rural areas they should receive in-service training on the educational needs of rural learners. University administration should improve accessibility to ancillary services at the university.

Above all else, I recommend that universities improve their function of community service in rural areas by applying their collective and individual intellectual resources. In rural areas, these resources are best used to help rural residents with environmental issues, community and economic development, financial planning, legal and medical resources. Regions with well-educated citizens are likely to show more economic growth than regions where educational attainment is lower. The collective resources of universities should be used to improve the

educational attainment of individual adults as well as the social and economic development in rural areas.

Recommendations for future research.

The following recommendations for future research come from the literature as well as the experiences of this individual. Some suggestions for research include:

- the characteristics of the adult learner in relationship to the delivery of adult education.
- the extent to which current university programs meet the needs of rural Saskatchewan residents.
- a profile of motivators and barriers to adult education in rural areas.
- the relationship between rural economic development and rural adult education.
- a profile of rural adult learners in Saskatchewan.

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Appendix A

Protocol for Interview Questions

How did you get started in your pursuit of a university education?

How important was support from your family and the local community?

How has distance, weather, class scheduling, family responsibilities, time constraints, and financial problems affected you?

How much information about programs, course offerings and services did you receive?

Were you able to get counselling and advice when you needed it?

How has living in a rural area affected your employment and educational goals?

Tell me about the variety and availability of classes.

Have you had access to library services, laboratories, and computers?

How important was it for you to have personal contact with your Athabasca courses?

Did you have an employment goal in mind when you started courses?

What have been the affects on you and your family of going back to school?

How would you describe yourself now and when you started courses?

Why did you want to pursue a university education?

Describe some of your experiences in your courses.

Was there a difference between male and female instructors?

Appendix B

Ethics approval

OFFICE OF ASSOCIATE VICE-PRESIDENT AND DEAN
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

DATE: October 1, 1996

TO: Karen Ann Rempel (McDonald)
Faculty of Education

FROM: G.W. Maslany, Chair
Research Ethics Review Committee

Re: **Doing Things the Hard Way: A Case Study on the Experiences of a Mature Part-Time University Student Living in Rural Saskatchewan**

Please be advised that the committee has considered this proposal and has agreed that it is:

✓ 1. Acceptable as submitted.
(Note: Only those applications designated in this way have ethical approval for the research on which they are based to proceed.)

_____ 2. Acceptable subject to the following changes and precautions (see attached):
Note: These changes must be resubmitted to the Committee and deemed acceptable by it prior to the initiation of the research. Once the changes are regarded as acceptable a new approval form will be sent out indicating it is acceptable as submitted.
Please address the concerns raised by the reviewer(s) by means of a supplementary memo.

_____ 3. Unacceptable to the Committee as submitted. Please contact the Chair for advise on whether or how the project proposal might be revised to become acceptable (ext. 4161/5186.)

G.W. Maslany

/mm
cc: M. Taylor, supervisor
(Ethics2.doc)

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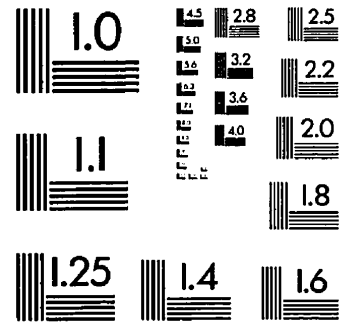

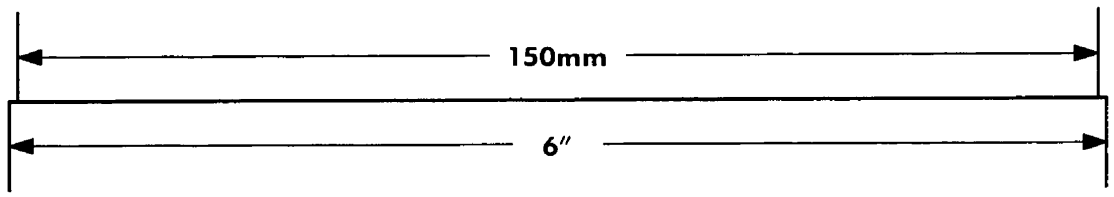

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