

LEARNING JOURNALS: A SHARING OF VOICE

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A Four-Credit Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Education
Of the University of Lethbridge
In Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF EDUCATION

LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA

May, 1999

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify, describe, examine and review the practice of journal writing with adult students returning to an academic upgrading program. The students' ability to reflect upon past experiences and development of metacognitive skills in their own personal journeys was documented in the writings of twenty-one students. The experiences presented in the journals provided data showing students' personal and academic growth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has come to fruition only with the help of some very significant people.

- The twenty-one students who were my inspiration for the project and who most willingly gave me their journals to use in my project.
- Olds College administration and colleagues who encouraged and supported me in pursuing my degree.
- Lorrinda for her time in being a second reader and Laurie for endless hours and patience in completing the revisions.
- Family and friends who have always provided support and encouragement.
- Sara, Kate and Eric for their patience when mom was writing.

Thanks also to David Townsend, my faculty advisor, who has been a pleasure to work with and who provided me with the guidance and support to complete my project.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Returning to school as an adult student is never an easy process. When you are thirty-five, have three children, no spouse and have not completed grade eight, returning is even more difficult. Connecting with instructors can also be a frightening experience if you left your elementary or high school with a negative experience.

What kinds of things can instructors do to make learning easier for students who have found learning difficult in the past?

The journal project at Olds College was initiated as a dialogue between student and coordinator to help provide some answers to the foregoing question. The purpose of the resulting study was to identify, describe, examine and review the practice of journal writing with adult students returning to an academic upgrading program, and the effects of journal writing on adult students' learning and attitudes. Students' ability to reflect upon past experiences and to develop metacognitive skills in pursuing and reviewing their own personal journeys, were documented through the writing of twenty-one students. The study was undertaken in anticipation that the experiences presented in the journals would provide evidence of an exciting adventure in sharing, trust, academic achievement and personal growth.

Background to Study

Students in an Academic Upgrading Program usually enter their program feeling very isolated, often afraid of the college itself and sure that they will fail. Upgrading students are returning to school for a variety of reasons which may include being laid off from work; wishing to pursue a new career; having been directed by a social worker to upgrade academic skills or seek employment; or requiring one or two courses to complete grade twelve.

The journal project idea was developed after I had been involved in graduate courses and discovered the use of journals and how powerful they were in the development of my own personal and academic growth. A new program was coming on line at Olds College and twenty-one students, all formerly on social assistance, were to be enrolled in academic upgrading. I decided to initiate the journal project first as a source of communication between the coordinator and students. I hoped the dialogue journal would become the "binder" of pertinent and important information to be shared between the coordinator and each student. I soon realized, however, that there was equally important and valuable information to be explored through a more focused study of what was happening and, thus, this creative project was undertaken.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Literature on journal writing appears in many journals under many headings and for a variety of purposes. Progroff (1975) saw the journal process as a journey presenting connections with life experiences and development of self. Many authors (see, for example Ernig, 1977; Enns 1993; Fulwiler 1980; Newton 1991; and Wagenaar, 1984) have written on the use of journal writing as important in subject-related areas. Journal writing as a reflective process is presented in the writings of authors such as Beauchamp (1989), Goldberg (1986), Hansen (1992), K. Heinrich (1992), and Parsons (1990 & 1994).

(i) *What are Journals?*

Grennan (1989) presents the journal as a connection, or voice, that returning students in particular need, because the first semester for new and returning students is a difficult one under the best circumstances. "For older students with families and jobs, it can be terminal, at least in the sense of their academic lives. The journal can be a source of security, a lifeline to the teacher, or a safety valve, a means of discovering meaning in the chaos of the social world; it is clearly an opportunity to integrate one's outside life and experience with the academic life and theory". (p. 40)

Progroff (1975) describes journal writing as a developmental process in life. He says the intensive journal process plays an active role in reconstructing a life, but it does so

without imposing external categories or interpretations or theories on the individual's experience. The journal remains neutral and open-ended so as to maintain the integrity of each person's development while drawing him further along the road of his own life process. This is done through specific procedures which give vitality to many factors that are lying dormant in the depth of the self, drawing them into the movement of the person's life by means of self-balancing principle that operates through the journal feedback process (p. 9).

Progroff contends that the journal is not categories for analysis but "mini" processes reflecting the individual aspect of a life in motion. (p. 34) In the daily log, entries are made that enable us to continue on a current basis with the movement of our lives. It has the function of gathering into one accessible place a running record of the subjective experiences of all kinds that move through a person's mind and emotions in the course of a day and a night. (p. 86)

Rainer (1978) describes the journal as a place to develop skills of self expression; a method for turning negative mental habits into positive energy; a way to gain perspective on your emotions and to resolve the past; a means of keeping touch with the continuity and rhythms of your place; a place to record meaningful insights; a way to preserve family and personal history; a quiet place to relax and refresh yourself; a device for freeing your intuition and imagination. (p. 20)

In the context of an adult learning environment, Kerka (1996) presents journals and diaries as having a long history as a means of self-expression. Several themes prevalent in adult learning, such as coming to voice, developing the capacity for critical reflection and making meaning, are reflected in the way journals can be used in education. The learning journal is a systematic way of documenting learning and collecting information for self-analysis and reflection. When used in an adult education class, it can be more or less structured depending on the objectives and degree of self-direction for the learners. (p. 1)

Schneider (1994) describes journal writing as the closest thing to natural speech, where writing can flow without self-consciousness, memory is aided and a context for healing and growth is provided. Sommer (1989) agrees that there is a lack of restriction of form, audience and evaluation.

Staton (1997) presents the dialogue journal as a communication tool between two people. The dialogue journal is designed to create interactions in which two minds can unite to bring about new understanding, new ideas, and new possibilities. In a dialogue, the student and teacher are equal participants, with each having the right to comment on the other's entry. A dialogue means continuity of discussion, until the meaning of a topic has been worked out; dialogue means unpredictability and novelty--it cannot be scripted.

(p. 54)

Fulwiler (1987) describes the characteristics of good journals as follows:

1. *Observations:* *Writers see something of interest and attempt to capture it in language.*
2. *Questions:* *Writers use journals to formulate and record questions, personal doubts, academic queries, questions of fact, administration and theory. It is more important, here, that there be questions than that yet there be answers.*
3. *Speculations:* *Writers wonder aloud, on paper, about the meaning of events, issues, facts, readings, patterns, interpretations, problems and solutions. The journal is the place to try out without fear of penalty; the evidence of the attempt is the value here.*
4. *Self-awareness:* *Writers become conscious of who they are, what they stand for, how and why they differ from others.*
5. *Digression:* *Writers depart as they write from what they intend to say, sometimes to think of personal matters and sometimes to connect apparently disparate pieces of thought.*
6. *Synthesis:* *Writers put together ideas, find relationships, connect one course or topic with another.*

7. *Revision:* *Writers look back at prior entries, realize they have changed their minds, and use the journal to update and record their later thoughts.*

8. *Information:* *Does the journal contain evidence that reading has been done, lectures listened to, facts and theories understood? (p. 2).*

Heinrich (1992) believes journal writing is a powerful technique that allows students to give words to their own inner dialogue. Through writing journal entries, students learn that writing can help organize ideas, practice can improve writing skills and noncritical feedback from teachers can help them deepen their understanding of ideas and thoughts. This supportive, intimate dialogue can empower some students to give voice to their emerging ideas in the broader arena of the classroom. (p. 20)

Fulwiler (1980) says the journal demands that students expand their awareness of what is happening to them, personally and academically. Student writers should be encouraged to experiment with their journals, to write often and regularly on a wide variety of topics, to take some risks with form, style and voice. (p. 17) In a similar vein, Mishra (1994) describes journals as being used to record students' ideas and reflections. Students write what they are learning about themselves and their courses. Their journals should be introspective, spontaneous, personal and self-expressive. (p. 1)

The response journal can be a powerful tool to help instructors connect with students on subject-related issues, creative ideas and personal issues affecting their learning.

Parsons (1990) emphasizes that the response journal is not a personal diary containing the events of the previous night, or a book in which students write things that are never read or responded to. The response journal is used in the reflection process on an ongoing basis with the instructor. A response journal is a convenient, familiar and flexible method for students to record, explore and reflect on their personal responses to diverse learning experiences. It is a technique to ensure that higher-level thinking processes are regularly addressed and that learning is routinely personalized, deepened and extended. The response journal is another way for individual students to "dialogue" in written form with their teachers and peers. (p. 13) Through response journals students begin to combine the elements of reading, writing, listening, observing, doing and thinking. They develop the link to the awareness of the commitment of the processes necessary to facilitate and maximize their learning. (p. 14)

(ii) *What are the benefits of journal writing to students and instructors?*

Progroff (1975) suggests one great benefit of journal writing is that it can be the process students use to connect themselves to their lives as those lives are unfolding. "This journey of life reveals its meaning and its goal. As we place ourselves between the experiences of our past and possibilities of the future, and we do this in an active way....But we enter the inner movement of our whole life history and connect ourselves

to it from within." (p. 13) Journal feedback is important so that the connections and communication occur. Feedback is achieved through nonjudgmental entries that record the events of our lives. There can be feedback both from reading the entries ourselves and having someone else respond to the entries in this format.

For Rainer (1978), the journal process is a problem-solving strategy through which we enter into and appreciate the process of our lives. "The process assists and develops creativity, a healthy response for feeling and tensions, a place to advise yourself, clarify goals, and make decisions....a way to nourish yourself with friendship and self-acceptance...a non-threatening place to work out relationships...a path to self-awareness and self-knowledge." (p. 19) The journal becomes an all important self-improvement process where individuals are guiding their own path. This path leads to discovering and taking responsibility for the direction and outcomes of individuals' direction in life. Writing out problems allows individuals to see the problem more clearly and take immediate action by focusing on the real issues. By focusing on issues and writing out action plans students can proceed along their learning path one hurdle at a time. (p. 19)

The journal is the authentic voice of the student. Kerka (1996) contends that writing is the critical ingredient enabling students to make connections between new information and what they already know. The journal is a text on which students reflect, but it is the

"learner's authentic voice, and this personal engagement adds a necessary affective element to the learning process." (p. 3) The teacher should function as a "metaguide", helping the learner focus on the reflective moment. (Paterson, 1995, p. 219) In the role of coach, mentor and dialogue partner, adult educators can serve as the "seasoned traveller" steering adult learners to document their learning through journal writing. (Kerka, p. 3)

Instructors must ensure that they have enough time to read the journals and respond so the assigning of entries may be less in large classes than in a smaller class. A problem may arise when students become too introspective and self-analytical, requiring assistance other than what the instructor can provide. An instructor must decide at some point whether to maintain the role of the instructor or play the role of the counsellor. In some cases, the most appropriate response may be to refer a student to counselling services. (Wagenaar, 1984, p. 434)

Mishra (1994) believes that through journals elements of mentoring and peer support evolve as benefits of the process. The teacher's role is transformed from being the disseminator of knowledge to becoming the coach and a mentor. The learners take ownership of their newly found knowledge, and thus more effectively internalize the concepts and the subject matter. (p. 2)

A journal can make education personal when students face the content of a problem or an issue and grapple with it. A journal provides for self-exploration, self-discovery; it encourages students to think and requires articulation of their thoughts. The instructor reinforces the personal contact when he or she responds individually to the comments, queries and concerns students express. (Weimer, 1992; p. 5)

Hols (1990) calls the student journal assignment "the most rewarding instructional technique I have found in a decade of community college teaching." Each student maintains an ongoing account of his or her learning experience relative to a topic or theme chosen to satisfy his or her own interests or curiosity. (p. 1) Students will benefit from journal writing in a variety of ways. For example, they expand their learning experiences; they gain more experience in writing, research, library use, observation skills, critical thinking, self-confidence, general knowledge, specialized knowledge, motivation to learn, enjoyment, and pride of accomplishment. The reward for the instructor is gratification, as students come alive and get involved. The instructor realizes that each student is a thinking, creative, sensitive, unique human being. (p. 2)

Grennan (1989) believes the personal nature of the journal reduces the stress of being a student by adding "voice" into the curriculum. This personal voice helps to reduce the barrier between "real" life and the artificial life. It allows and encourages readers of those journals to respond in an empathetic, supportive and non-authoritarian voice. For most

students, at least initially, the teacher is an authority figure. Most overcome this but the relationship established via the journal is different, and can be vital. The journal sensitizes faculty to the complexity of the lives of non-traditional students, as well as the individual timetables of learning among heterogeneous adults. Through written responses, important and supportive feedback is provided to the students, contributing to their sense that their struggle is being empathetically observed and their work encouraged. (p. 40)

Through journals, students have a direct link and connection to their instructor.

Fulwiler (1980) says teachers especially can profit by the regular introspection and self-examination process of journal writing. The importance of coupling personal with academic learning should not be overlooked; self-knowledge provides the motivation for whatever other knowledge an individual learns and absorbs. Without an understanding of who we are, we are not likely to understand fully why we study biology rather than forestry, literature rather than philosophy. In the end, all knowledge is related; the journal helps clarify the relationships. (p. 19)

Fulwiler also notes that the journal is a personal empowering process and the personal responses act first as a mirror, enabling individuals to recognize what they are thinking and the patterns created by that process; in the subsequent reflective stage, the responses then form a window into the very nature of these thoughts, establishing how and why individuals actually learn. (p. 9)

Sommer (1989) argues that the value of journal writing to a course with adult students cannot be overemphasized. Journal writing is a tool that helps students to explore their learning world.

(iii) How can the journal assist in the development of metacognitive skills?

Parsons (1994) defines metacognition as the ability of an individual to consciously reflect on and talk about thinking: specifically, learners begin to focus on their patterns of thought and become aware of how and, eventually, why they process experiences the specific ways they do. This ability is enhanced by developmental factors and encouraged by reflective practices, such as personal response. Although students can engage in higher level thinking process without it, independent, self-motivated learners require metacognitive ability to reach their goals. (p. 16) They need to possess the ability to make sense of their lived experience by relating it to their present learning situations.

According to McPeck (1990), the best way to teach critical thinking is when a real problem or dilemma exists. The ability to reflect, question, and suspend judgement or beliefs, while taking the context into consideration, comprises the skills necessary for critically addressing a specific situation. (p. 30)

Mishra (1994) describes journals as being used to stimulate critical thinking and the development of metacognitive skills because they allow students to think through

problem-solving protocols that are utilized to decipher difficult problems. Through journals, students are writing to learn and learning to write. Writing creates intellectual as well as emotional involvement with a discipline and learning is personal and long lasting. When writing in journals is incorporated with concepts of cooperative learning, adult motivation, metacognition and classroom research, student learning is enhanced. (p. 3)

Chaffee (1992) observes that when educators and employers say they want students who can think effectively, they are generally referring to a variety of cognitive activities which include:

- solving problems and making informed decisions
- generating, organizing and evaluating ideas
- reasoning analytically with concepts and abstract properties
- exploring issues from multiple perspectives
- applying knowledge to various contexts and new circumstances
- critically evaluating the logic and validity of information
- developing evidence and arguments to support views
- carefully analyzing situations with appropriate questions
- discussing subjects in an organized way and
- becoming aware of one's own thinking process in order to monitor and direct it. (p. 3)

Becoming a critical thinker involves developing insight, reflective judgment, informed beliefs and a willingness to question. Bondy (1984) describes the difference between cognition and metacognition as a difference in self-awareness and control. Whereas cognitive processes may occur automatically and subconsciously, metacognitive processes involve conscious monitoring and regulation. The basic skills of metacognition include predicting the consequences of an action or event, checking the results of one's own actions (did it work?), monitoring one's ongoing activity (how am I doing?), reality testing (does this make sense?) and a variety of other behaviors for coordinating and controlling deliberate attempts to learn and solve problems. (p. 234)

Bondy suggests the daily "learning log" is a useful way of promoting a general awareness of metacognition activity. Through the learning log students are able to identify points of confusion, formulate questions for further study or clarification and recognize important insights. By shifting the focus from academic products to cognitive process, teachers can help students become active monitors of their own learning. (p. 235)

Bransford, Sherwood and Sturdevant (1987) stress the importance of reflection in students' ability to develop transferral of skills. Without an emphasis of reflection, analysis, and systematization, powerful transfer probably will not occur. By the same token, students need help to reflect upon the processes they use to identify and solve

problems. They also need an explicit appreciation of how new knowledge can provide problem solving tools. (p. 178)

Cranton (1992) contends the response of the instructor to journal writing is extremely valuable. The instructor-student dialogue provides the opportunity for learner and educator to know each other; and, most importantly for working towards transformative learning, it provides an opportunity to question or challenge assumptions that appear in writing. (p. 156) The student learns by doing and saying and receiving responses to apply different approaches and strategies to learning.

(iv) ***How is the journal a tool in the process of lifelong learning?***

The journal and the reflective process it promotes become resources in the adult upgrading classroom when students are developing a portfolio, for example. Prior learning assessment and recognition is a process of identifying, assessing and recognizing what a person knows and can do. The process can take various forms and the outcomes can be used to further an individual's education, training or work goals. (ADRI, PLAR Task Team, Nov., 1997)

The portfolio can be part of a process that helps adult learners to gain employment, academic credit, or other recognition; or it can be used as a method of self-assessment.

Sansregret calls the portfolio one of the best ways to thoroughly take inventory of what an individual has learned so far. (Sansregret, Forum Presentation, 1995, p. 2)

A well documented portfolio includes a synthesis of accomplishments, a serious reflection upon the direction one's life is taking, and a statement about acquired functional skills and learning that is linked to specific employment criteria or learning objectives.

Lifelong learning is clearly the key to professional development and job mobility. The portfolio development process can be an essential tool for assisting people to gain recognition for their learning. Recently, governments and the public have become much more aware that time and resources for education and training are limited. At the same time, changes are occurring rapidly in most career areas. Therefore, it is essential that the knowledge and skills people bring to the workplace or classroom are recognized and used where it is appropriate to do so. (Burke & Van Kleef, p. 28)

Agencies offering training in portfolio assessment indicate that the task of showing evidence of learning is often both the most challenging and most rewarding aspect of portfolio preparation. It is also a way for learners to become more systematic and organized about recording their learning. (Sansgret, 1995, p. 98)

According to Sansgret, the process of developing a comprehensive portfolio can be undertaken as follows:

1. A Review of Life Experiences

Begin by reviewing all that has been accomplished to the present. Reflect on significant life events and activities that have been influential (eg. paid and unpaid work, personal experiences, community service, credit and non-credit courses, training, special accomplishments, hobbies, recreational activities and special recognition events). Making this inventory helps to recall events that may have generated new learning. In this initial review it is best to inventory all possible learning experiences without judging or applying criteria or qualifications to the experiences. This can be done through the journal process.

After a thoughtful review on life and work experiences has been completed, the achievements of the student should be summarized into a brief written autobiographical statement. This is a unique opportunity for portfolio developers to ponder seriously on their life accomplishments. The literature suggests that few adults in our society take the opportunity or time for serious and meaningful reflections. (Sansgret, 1998, p. 99)

2. A Review of Life Objectives

After the inventory of life and work experiences, candidates are ready to consider their future goals and what objectives must be addressed to attain them. Reviewing their life objectives gives adults an opportunity to recall past goals and objectives that may not have been attained for reasons such as lack of money, geographical situation and family responsibilities. (Sansgret, 1997, p. 1) This review is important because it helps candidates to better understand the link between their experiential learning and potential future goals. Several writers report that by taking time to think carefully about their future objectives, candidates learn to organize their thoughts, establish objectives, define their expectations and take more responsibility for their own personal development. (see for example, Kimeldor, 1996-97, p. 16)

Early advocacy by the Canadian Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) resulted in portfolios becoming a preferred method for helping adults identify their learning so that it could be eventually assessed. (Knapp, p. 40) Sansgret reports that many institutions have adopted the portfolio method and it has proven to be the surest way to identify prior learning that results from informal and formal studies, unpaid work, leisure activities and other events in a person's life. A portfolio is not only a file of information accumulated about a person's past experience and accomplishments. It is a process by which prior

learning experiences can be translated into documented learning outcomes that are then assessable for possible recognition. It must be clearly understood that the portfolio as such is not assessed; rather, the learning outcomes described in the portfolio are what need to be assessed. (Sansgret, 1995, p. 7)

Chapter 3

Methods

(i) *Purpose of Study*

The intent of this study was to identify, describe, examine and review the practice of journal writing with adult students in an Academic Upgrading environment. The ability to reflect upon past experience and to develop learning and personal strategies, which would assist students in their academic and personal growth, was one anticipated outcome. Every attempt was made to present a descriptive picture of the journal process, and the outcomes, through the written "voice" of the students.

(ii) *Methodology*

a. *Qualitative Research*

Qualitative research relies primarily on observations (particularly participant observation) and interview. The purpose of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of individuals and events in their material state, taking into account the relevant content. (Borg, Gall, Gall, 1995, p. 195)

The goal is to provide for the reader of the research what Clifford Geertz (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) terms "thick description." The description must specify everything the reader may know in order to understand. (Eisner, 1991)

Qualitative research must constantly consider the importance of background and content to the processes of understanding and interpreting data. (Patton, 1980)

Grounded theory is derived inductively from data using the constant comparative method of data analysis developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to close the gap between theory and empirical research. It involves making a comparative analysis of social units of any size by unitizing, coding and categorizing phenomena. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) Tacitly understood similarities, which depend on the sensitivity of the researcher for their perception, are used to do the unitizing and categorizing. The process is similarly described by Spradley (1988) as "domain analysis." The aim of the analysis is to gain better understanding of the complexities of human interaction.

Relationship to Subject

"In qualitative research, the researcher deliberately interacts in a personal way with each individual in the study. Thus the researcher's data collection procedures are open to modification depending on how the individual acts. Furthermore, the researcher is free to use her intuition and judgement as a basis for deciding how to frame questions or how to make observations." (Borg, Gall & Gall, p. 196)

Descriptive research, as its name implies, aims to describe the characteristics of the phenomena being studied. (p. 218)

b. Gathering of Data

Patton (1987) describes qualitative methods of data collecting consisting of three kinds (1) in depth, open-ended interviews (2) direct observations and (3) written documents, including such sources as open-ended written items on questionnaires, personal diaries and program records. Patton states that analysis of the documents yields excerpts, quotations or entire passages from records, correspondence, official reports and open-ended surveys. (p. 7)

The sources of the data for this qualitative research were the journals of twenty-one students in the "Getting Started" program. The students (see Appendix A) gave permission to the researcher to use the journals for the purpose of this study. Analysis of these documents provided the "thick description." Through the use of colour and other coding devices, themes and patterns were observed in the writings of the students. A second instructor in Career and Academic Preparation was asked to read the journals to identify and verify themes which were reoccurring. All names presented in this research have been changed to ensure confidentiality of the students' identities.

(iii) Program Description

Olds College's "Getting Started-Moving Towards a New Future" provided skills and training necessary for selected adults to access employment or career training. The program was designed to prepare students for entry into Advanced Education programs or to better prepare adult students to meet the demands of today's marketplace. The course involved two (2) sixteen-week semesters. The program was designed so that all students were together in Life Skills for three weeks as an orientation to their education and employment training. After the initial orientation students then moved into a self-paced academic upgrading program, with "Life Skills" workshops interspersed throughout the semester.

(iv) Program Overview:

The program was designed to meet the needs of the students and was offered in many individual combinations.

Term 1:

Step 1 Life Skills - 3 Weeks

Step 2 Academic Upgrading - 13 Weeks

Step 3 Those students who needed alternate programming would enter work experience component for 8 weeks.

Term 2:

Step 1 Life Skill - 3 Weeks (for new students entering program)

- Step 2 Group A - Academics 13 Weeks
Group B - (Returning Students) - Academics 16 weeks
- Step 3 Those students who needed alternate programming would enter work experience component for 8 weeks.

Follow-Up:

When students exited the program either through further educational programming or employment training they were to be contacted on a monthly basis to ensure a smooth transition to their new program.

(v) *Instruction Delivery Mode:*

The mode of instruction was mainly group interaction and discussion. Instructors provided a workshop presentation format when covering the Life Skills topics. Because of the diversity of the student population and their academic skills. Other instruction was either teacher-directed or self-directed depending on the needs of the students.

(vi) *Objectives for Participation, Graduation & Placement:*

The primary goal of the program was to prepare people with significant educational/employment barriers to enter the labor market or specific educational/vocational training programs.

Objectives:

Educationally to:

- a) prepare students to enter upgrading or directly into the job market
- b) practice employment related academics e.g. numeracy, literacy
- c) develop computer skills (students overcome fear of technology and apply their skills to process work independently and professionally)

Vocationally to:

- a) develop skills necessary for employment
- b) set achievable goals
- c) explore career goals
- d) identify career objectives

Socially to:

- a) increase self-confidence
- b) develop interpersonal communication skills
- c) develop organizational skills useful to home and career planning
- d) develop independent living/survival skills

Recruitment, Assessment and Selection Process:

Admissions Criteria:

Applicants had to be Family and Social Service or U.I.C. recipients. Family and Social Service applicants had to be referred to the program by Social Services Personnel.

(vii) *Program Participants*

Twenty-one first year academic upgrading students were engaged in journal writing for twenty-four weeks. Subsequently, they agreed to allow their journals to be analyzed for the purpose of this study. The subjects, eighteen females and three males, ranged in age from twenty-two to forty-eight. The mean age was thirty-five. Their backgrounds varied widely but all subjects were clients of Family and Social Services. Subjects were a part of this program because they were receiving financial support from Family & Social Services. Although the inclusion of reasons for this financial support (e.g. heart attack, business failure, down-trend in oil business, separation from spouse) might have added an interesting dimension to the data analysis and interpretation, it was avoided to protect privacy and to ensure confidentiality.

After they had been given an explanation of intent and purpose of the study, presented in a group session and in letter format (Appendix B), all students signed and returned a consent form giving permission to use their journals in the study. In the group session it was emphasized that if students were reluctant they should not participate. No one

declined, and subjects were quite eager to participate. During the collection phase of the study the subjects and researcher were acquainted in the roles of students and coordinator. During the data collection phase, which lasted twenty-eight weeks, the subjects and researcher communicated in a variety of ways which included 28 hours of in-class activities, individual office visits, and small group interaction on the use of the journal in the classroom.

(viii) Procedure

Upon receiving project approval from the Human Subjects Committee, Faculty of Education, I asked the twenty-one subjects to participate in the study. With the permission of the subjects, their "journal binders" were recalled at the end of the twenty-eight weeks. The journal entries included both the student entries and the instructor's responses.

The journals were studied and analyzed. Comments by students and the instructor were color coded to identify themes, patterns and issues. A second instructor was asked to participate in the study and review the journals to look for any additional themes, patterns and issues. This second instructor assisted in the analysis and color coding and provided valuable identification and clarification of themes and patterns.

Participants were involved in the use of response journals as part of a Student for Success course. The students were requested to complete the journal entries and hand them in to their instructor ten times during the twenty-eight weeks. Some of the journals were incomplete but were used in the study as even their limited descriptions and writings were found to be quite informative.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

1. Amount of involvement of subjects and researcher:

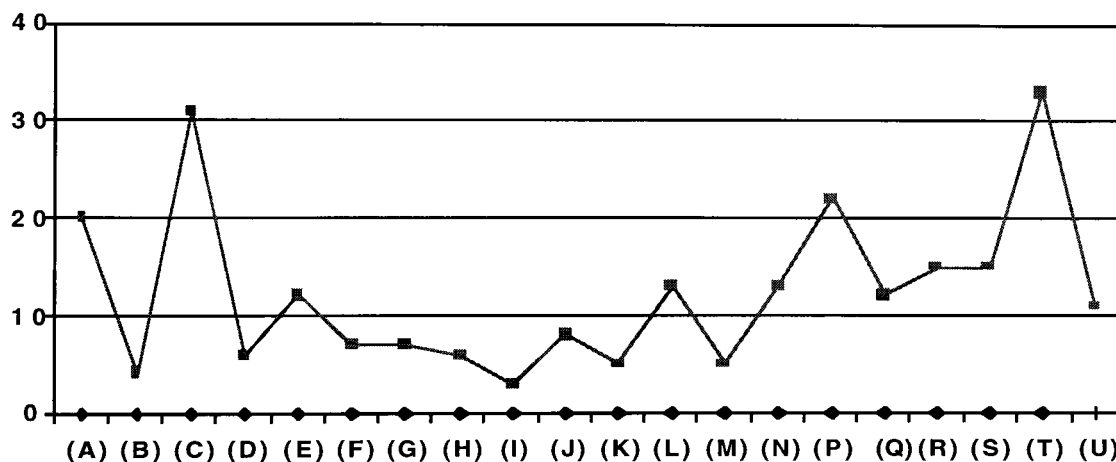
The subjects were provided with an overview of journal writing in small groups sessions. Parsons' (1990) "Response Journals" was used as a guide for the instructor. Subjects were asked to write in their journals about their learning experiences during the previous two weeks. They were told their writing could be presented in a variety of ways. Guidelines were provided to subjects that would assist them in writing in their journals. Heimrich (1992), supports the concept that purpose and guidelines set the tone for the type of dialogue teachers establish with students to determine how the journals are evaluated. (p. 18) This was done on several occasions during the study.

Suggestions about types of entries were provided as an outline for subjects to consider. They were told they could include review of student progress, academic, social, or personal issues related to their program. They were then given an "evaluation" of their writing based on stated criteria and involving completed entries from the previous two weeks. The evaluation was formative in nature and students received feedback on their journal writings each time the journal was completed. At the end of the term a summative evaluation was completed and a student grade was assigned as a part of their Student for Success Course.

2. Numbers of Entries

Subjects were asked to hand in their journals every two weeks during a twenty-four week session. Subjects were free to write as many entries as they desired. I expected 8-10 entries would be close to the mean. As I had requested the journals at the end of the course, I expected that some students would not have kept their journal binders intact and would be missing entries. This did occur in ten per cent of the journals. All journals were used in the study. Entries ranged from a low of three (3) entries to a high of thirty-three, with the average number of entries being twelve.

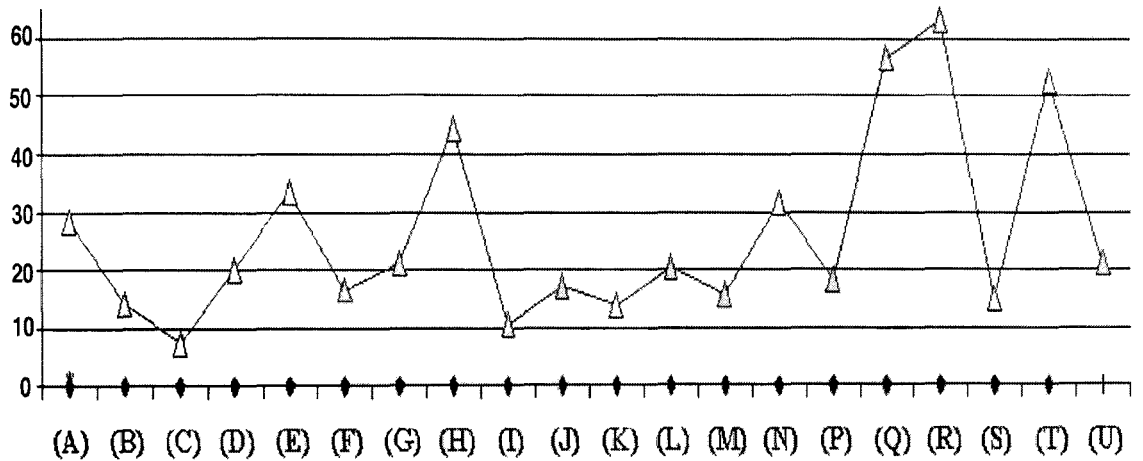
Table 1. Number of Entries



3. Number of Lines per Entry

Subjects were not given a limit on the number of lines they were expected to write in a journal entry. The number of lines per entry ranged from 2 to 282, with an overall average of 25 lines per entry.

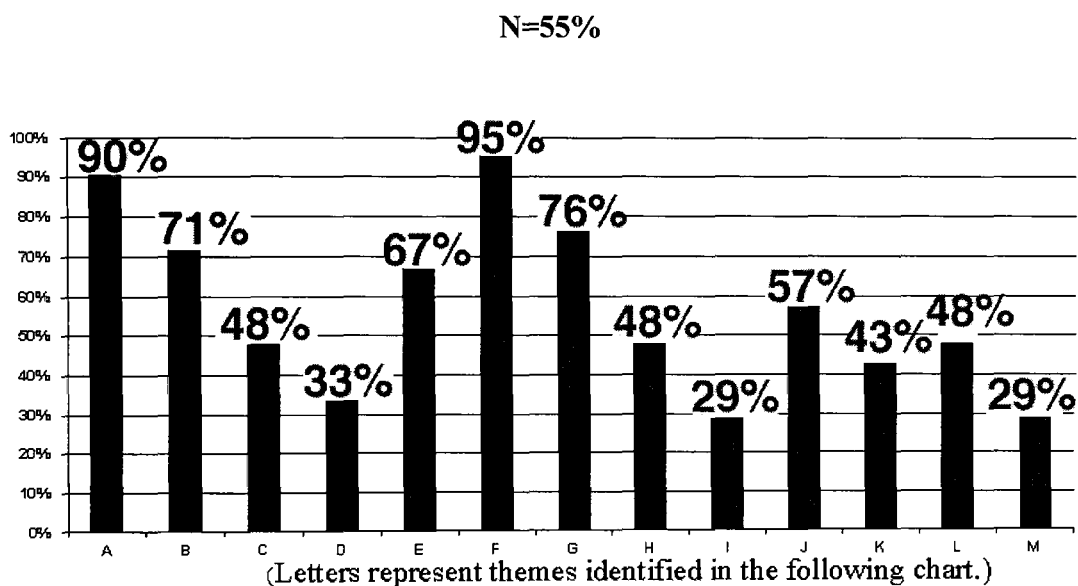
Table 2: Total # of Lines Per Entry



4. Themes of Student Responses

Themes were color coded and identified by two researchers. Themes appearing in at least twenty-five percent of the journals are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Student Responses



Themes identified were as follows:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| A. Personal Issues | H. Health Issues |
| B. Feeling Proud | I. Future |
| C. Fear of Failure | J. Workload Difficulty |
| D. Supportive Classmates | K. Relationship Issues |
| E. Positive about Instructors | L. Criticisms of Other Students |
| F. Grades | M. Program Made a Big Difference |
| G. Increased Self-Esteem | |

5. Instructor Responses

Mishra (1994), describes the role of the teacher as being transformed from the disseminator of information to becoming a coach and a mentor. The instructor responses identified in the journal were classified under the terms of encouragement, clarification, support, referral sources and reassurance. Individual comments ranged from three lines to eight lines, with an average of five lines per entry. At times, subjects were requested to meet with the instructor to further discuss a journal entry. At this meeting subjects may have received a further referral to a career counsellor, mental health worker or financial support.

6. The Learning Journals: A Sharing of Voice

The following excerpts provide an introduction to the range and tone of students' journal entries.

"I feel somewhat at peace with myself, a feeling of doing something useful. A comfort of finishing a long forgotten task."

Sharon

"Sometime while writing in my journal I have to pinch my skin to make sure I'm for real as I can't believe that I've become so involved, (wrapped up) in the learning process. I love it-- is this really me?"

Lorinda

"Today I'm going to ask myself why am I here as this past weekend it really made me wonder. I'm here because:

- 1. Welfare said that it would be the right thing to do;*
- 2. I always wanted to upgrade myself;*
- 3. I was tired of being the door-mat;*
- 4. I was tired of having no money; and*
It was my turn."

Hazel

What follows are some references to particular themes and the ways in which different students reacted to different aspects of the course and the process.

A. Grades

The student entries related to student grades showed development process over time. Students themselves were able to monitor their progress, show their successes and write about how they saw themselves as their learning progressed. Students wrote about their successes, their failures and how they felt about their learning. In a separate section of their journal binder students kept track of all assignments and marks.

Some of these entries were quite business-like, as shown by the following one.

"Well Pat this is going to be a pretty short entry in my journal. School is going quite well, my average in math is 83%, and my average in science is 85%. I am quite pleased with my marks. I have never done this well in school. Especially in these two subjects. I am finding school a bit easier this time around. I guess I am just more focussed this time around."

Donna

Others were a bit more celebratory, as in the next example.

"Thank god for friends, and school mates. On Friday the 11th I was ready to do the math test, I took it, I did pretty good. I got 66%, I'm proud of myself. I went on to the next Chapter (Decimal) . I whizzed through that as well. I took the test for decimal, Tuesday the 15th, I pasted with 77%. I'm pretty proud of myself."

Hazel

Students writing about their progress in the course began to show evidence of an ability to reflect on their learning, seeking to know why they did so well or why they didn't do so well. By sharing their progress and their failures with their instructor they began to show their learner's voice.

The following three examples show variations of this theme.

"Today I wrote my percentage test and really bombed. I only got 64%. The lowest mark I've ever gotten so far. That sure didn't make me feel very good. I thought I did good but I sure didn't. You know when I was going to school before, 64% would of been great for me as I never passed anything but now my marks are in the 80's and I just hate that mark. I will rewrite it again on Monday. I know I shouldn't get so upset but it sure was a shock."

Pat

"School's been going not bad. I just think I've been pushed too much in the time that we have. In Math I am still in geometry, but on Friday I will try the test and hopefully do well on it. Because I still don't understand some of the methods yet, and in English 13 I'm ahead. I did my first test and got 72%. Social Studies I find real hard, but on our first assignment I got 70%. So not bad I guess. My personal life is going well to, no men in it. So everything is going pretty good.."

Wendy

"What a heck of a day its been. This morning I wrote another math test but this time it was a lot of problem solving in Ratio's. I was finding it very hard because my reading is so bad. I don't read the problem right so I don't answer it right. To me I find that very

frustrating. Again the frustration took me right back to when I was going to elementary. That feeling of being unsure about myself was right back again. I find I get so angry at myself because I just don't understand. I sure wish there was something I could do to make my reading better. I know everything takes time. I'm doing really good in staying caught up with everyone, also my grades aren't too bad. I guess I should be thankful."

Pat

These examples show the students talking out about their past feelings and insecurities and talking themselves into feeling positive about learning.

"We have started our main subjects now. The one that is giving me the most problems is Math. It is not really a problem just that it is overwhelming, because when I left school I had failed grade nine and now I am right in the middle of grade ten Algebra (which I had never seen before). But I will plod on. The science is no problem, as soon as I understand the metric system. The final subject, English is fairly easy as I can remember most of it."

Brenda

In this final example can be seen the development of metacognitive awareness. Bondy (1984) states that students engaged in writing about thinking experiences were able to identify points of confusion, formulate questions for further study and recognize

important insights. (p. 235) By writing about their courses and grades students in this study began to discover how they learn, how they have overcome their fears of school and how success in school has increased their self-esteem and assisted in developing an "I can" attitude.

B. Personal issues

Students writing in the journal shared many personal issues. As Schneider (1994) describes it, the journal can be a place for growth and healing. The beginning entries in the journals were vague about personal lives and issues. As the students developed a sense of trust with the reader they began to share more of their personal lives. The sharing contributed to personal growth in the form of recognizing issues and trying to deal with crises, joys and fears. At times the entries were a sharing of how their lives were at that moment and such entries made up the second highest number of actual entries.

The following examples were quite typical.

"I thought you would like to hear the news of the report. I finally received it and as I told you I was said to be the better parent for my girls. I wasn't surprised, but we had to

go through this procedure. He really has given me a lot of trouble, but now I think I can finally get on with my business, and after this report is filed maybe he'll understand this."

Georgette

"On Sunday July 10, it started once he was at the house and wouldn't leave, so I called the R.C.M.P. Now he is in jail I'm not doing any better but I'm in school. Some people talk to me about it. Some think I was in the wrong to put the peace bond on but they don't understand what he's like. Some of the girls stopped talking to me over this but I will pull through."

Francis

"You asked me how I'm handling "the break-up." It's not going well at all. Nothing is going very well. Believe me there's many nights of crying myself to sleep. Some days I feel like I'm not going to make it. Everything blew up in my face in a matter of days."

Ester

"One thing I would like to say something about our class is, that everyone is willing to help each other if one is having a problem whether it be math, science or

english. With each of us helping each other I know that "I" will be able to handle the work load and learn a lot more than if I tried to do it on my own ."

Andrea

"I went home from school yesterday and my son was sitting there. when I walked through the door he said to me he got suspended indefinitely again. I phoned the school and they don't want Jason, my son back there, as he disturbs the other students. The one way they want Jason back is in September at the Quest Program. That's when a student lives there. It seem that nobody can control my son. He does what he pleases when ever he wants."

Helen

"Con's wedding date is drawing closer and it is really taking a toll on me. It's almost as if I think that if there is such a thing as a magic button - and soon I'll find it, push it and she'll tell me it was only a dream. No such luck thus far!

Right now I feel it is not only a learning experience but a therapy as well. It's also during a crisis like this that I really, really miss my dear mother, who passed away 4 1/2 years ago. She always said very little but she had a "caring ear" and always a few words of wisdom."

Roberta

"Dawn, my daughter is back in the hospital again. So I have to try to split my time between working and going to Calgary, which gets a person pretty tired after awhile. Every time I visit the hospital I leave feeling so down and mixed up. I don't know what I want to do, if it's go back to school or go to work, or just say screw it all. But after a couple of days things start to clear up again."

Jason

"You asked me what was bothering me well sit down because this is going to take awhile. First off is that we first moved onto a acreage and the landlord is trying to rip us off. He has made an agreement with the water company to shut off the water from 4-9:00pm to conserve water, he neglected to tell us this when we moved in. The second is we are responsible for the electric, but he also has 3 quonsets and welders that run off the same meter. So in other words we are also paying his hydro as well."

Nancy

"To start off I finally got rid of Rob. I guess you could say the thorn in my side. That was one relief off my shoulders. It got to the point where he wouldn't leave and he wouldn't even work. So I was supporting him too. Well, I had enough of that so I told him to leave permanently. He started to show up here at the college and bug me. He kept wanting to talk. Then he gave me a letter of how sorry he was and that he loved me, needed me, etc. I showed Hazel the letter and she didn't even look at it and already knew

what was in it. She gave me a good piece of advice. She told me to give myself some breathing room. I am glad that she said something like that or I would have gone back to the same situation. Then my other brother (the one that was missing) showed up on my doorstep while I was with Rob so of now I had 2 adults and four kids to look after. Well I can tell ya that my money never lasted for the month due to having to supply everything. So I told my brother last night that he had to leave too. I feel like such an ass for having to do that. I tried so many times to get him to leave and he always made me feel 2 inches tall. He always threw it back in my face that he had nowhere to go and that he would have to live on the streets. So of course I'd let him stay. I can't afford to keep them there. I only receive so much money and I just can't do it. People are always telling me that I give in too easy and that I'm a softy. I have a real hard time standing up for myself. I am always worried that a certain person is going to hate me. I hope I can be more assertive."

Jennifer

" Pat, I know that I am a good person but it is hard to get out of that hole when that goodness seems always to be put down. While I am at school I feel free and it will be better now that I am the only one driving into town in the mornings. Now every morning I can get myself up, have a peaceful cup of coffee and make only one lunch and then head for school. I will also not be in that much of a hurry to head home. I will miss going every Friday."

Hazel

Through these kinds of entries students were able to gain perspective on their lives and, most often, develop goals that would help them better their present situation. Entries showed growth and understanding and an emerging hopefulness that life would get better. Issues present were explored through a dialogue with the instructor. The real-life voices of the students began to be heard.

C. Pride

A strong sense of self worth and pride was present in the entries of many students. Often it took the form of an inner voice saying “I can” or “I am good.” Writers were able to share this pride with the instructor. Sometimes it was described in terms of grades, or overcoming personal challenges, or becoming a more “successful” learner and person.

I have included many examples of these because they are the sorts of entries that appealed most strongly to my own sense of worth and usefulness as an instructor.

"I can't believe that with all the stress I've had, just from making the switch of being self employed to bankruptcy, to having problems with my daughter, to going back to school; finding out my 15 year old is pregnant, letting her get married, her having marriage problems; I wonder how well I would have really done if I had not had all these "bumps" along the way? I am proud of myself because I did the best I could do with everything that was handed to me, be it home problems or school assignments - I can

honestly say I tried hard - even though I sometimes briefly thought about quitting everything."

Roberta

"I entered into the 'Getting Started' program with great enthusiasm. I had many doubts as to whether I could manage to stick with this goal as I hardly ever finished anything completely. Believing that I wasn't smart, I had agreed with myself that passing marks would be sufficient and when my work showed otherwise I reevaluated my self doubt and began believing that I was intelligent and decided to apply myself 100%.

The seven months that I have attended school has changed me completely. The low-self esteem that I had entered school with is at a higher level and is building. Not only has my school work picked up my esteem, so has interacting with other adults. It has been a long time since I've done this and it's fantastic. Being a student was the best move that I have ever made.

My dreams and aspirations are things I never think about. I have spent most of my life living in a dazed state so living for today keeps me very busy. My biggest dream at this moment is to finish upgrading and keeping my grades up."

Jane

"Well time for English. I understand it well and I'm very proud for getting 84% on my first test."

Laurie

"Things are really starting to come together for me and I am beginning to see a future ahead. I am finally realizing how coming back to school is helping me. My self-esteem is a lot better and I am getting myself back into circulation, instead of staying at home and wondering if I have a future. At this time I can finally see a light at the end of the tunnel of despair and now I have definite plans for a family, a business, a home and a future. Another part of my new outlook is that I finally have my back pain under control, which is allowing me to have a better outlook for the future."

Brenda

"This course has made me feel better about myself. It has made me feel like I can succeed. It may be a struggle but its worth it in the long run. Please tell me that's true! If I can continue what I'm doing and feel good about my accomplishments, then I know I'll go far."

Ester

"Since starting the courses six weeks ago I feel that my self-esteem and future outlook have both improved 100%. My self-esteem has doubled, this is probably due to being off of social services and finally having a plan for my future. One that I intend to follow."

Brenda

"Just a short journal today because I've got to go to the doctors this afternoon in Calgary. Things are going really well except I've got a lot to finish before next week. I know though I can do it. Hey can you believe I said that? I know I can and will get everything done."

Pat

"Once again it is journal time, it seems to come and go so quickly. At first I really did not enjoy writing weekly or biweekly journals but now I really don't mind so much. Not that very much exciting happens in my meagre existence. Although it is enough to keep me going from day to day.

Life has seemed to improve tremendously since I have been here. At times I am almost tolerable where before I was not. Yes, yes I was not always a happy camper....Having something to work towards for oneself and not for others constantly really improves ones self-worth.

Classes are going great. I wrote the unit 8 test for math 24 on June 14, 1994. Once again, I pulled off a 100%, that makes 8 in a row. I am afraid that I will not do so well on the final though. I should be ready to write by Thursday. I hope.....

I still find that I struggle in English. I sure am glad that there are people out there who have confidence in me that I am capable of doing okay. It really does help. Thanks Pat...."

Sara

"Basically, since I have started this course I am a more secure person able to handle what is asked of me and I have a goal to achieve and a will to achieve it.."

Sharon

"Boy, these extra two hour classes sure are hard on a person. My first day was yesterday and I went home just exhausted. I guess its like everything else, I'll get used to it. I know when the 1st of April comes, I'll be more than glad that I did this extra time, by then I'll need a holiday. You know I'm really surprised I've even gone this far, in the past I've always been a quitter. I'm sure enjoying coming back to school. Sometimes I don't feel I can handle it but I seem to carry on anyway."

Pat

"Applying for the Getting Started Program, for me, was not totally my decision. Having gone through a very stressful business loss, I had no choice, but to declare bankruptcy. This led to no income, and no alternative but to go to Social Services for assistance. I was not aware of this program, but thanks to a social worker, Judy, I was informed of the fact that every person in the province was entitled to a grade 12 education. At this point, I must have been visibly stressed, because when Judy explained the program, I was left with the option of taking a year off, with counselling or attempting the school program. As I pondered the two options, my mind told me to get counselling, but my heart told me to attempt the education. Although, I chose the latter, I knew that the mental struggle would be my largest burden.

In summing up, my January Getting Started Program entrance was a tremendous fear of failure, because of the business failure. I also started the program with a very bitter attitude, because of the business loss. However, there has never been a doubt in my mind, that entering the school, even at my age would do nothing but benefit my person and future.

School, for me, was probably one of the most gratifying challenges I have ever experienced. Within the first two weeks, I realized I had made the right choice. The past seven months have mentally been a series of roller-coaster rides, up one day, and down the next. As far as the school program is concerned. I have no regrets at all. My attitude towards being a failure in life has drastically changed, thanks, a great deal, to the support and help from my instructors. It was those people who helped me realize I could succeed

in the program. Although it doesn't seem like much of a function, it was those people who gave me that little push, that created the positiveness I needed to overcome the next hurdles. I have overcome a tremendous amount of bitterness by realizing there are other goals in life besides having such a hate for the people in your past. I believe this program changed my life, for the better, in so many ways, but most important, I have come to realize there can be a future for me, and with a positive attitude and a little help, I will reasonably be able to focus on a secure future."

Eric

"Well, we are getting close to the nitty gritty, Final Exams, I mean. I still have 1 full book to go in math, I'm praying I will be done by the 19th of August. Final exams always scare me, I am usually a nervous wreck when it comes to any exams, I think I am handling it fairly well so far. Things at home are getting better with Jane, she seems to be settling down more and has also made some friends in Olds, which helps a lot. Her friends are boys mostly, but that doesn't bother me, she has a couple of girl friends, she stays close to from Calgary, I tell you the phone never stops for her. She seems to be quite popular at the moment. By the way, not complaining or anything, but the air conditioning in the school is way too cold, I'm freezing in there, can we talk to one of the janitors about this. We watched the lightning last night, from the deck of the apartment, it was quite a

spectacle. I guess its amazing what you do for entertainment, when you have no money, even watching the moon, its getting pretty ridiculous, what next, ha! "

Kate

D. Thank-You's

The students were quite expressive in their gratitude to program staff. Students wrote freely of their concerns, their thanks and recommendations.

"Well that is about all I have to say for now....oh ya! I forgot to mention the Drumheller trip. It was great. It is really fascinating to view the museum. I used to spend a lot of time at the Royal Ontario Museum when I lived in Toronto. I am planning to take my children to Drumheller. Not only to visit the museum, but there are so many other things to do there. I really think that they will have a great time.

Thanks again for having confidence in all of us, Pat. Some would be lost if it was not for your encouragement."

Karen

"I wish you a very good summer. It was great knowing you and hope to see you again in Sept. The very best to you in your endeavors and I wish you the very best in the future.

These past seven months have been a great help to me and I thank you for being there when we needed you."

Hazel

"I was sitting here thinking, if I was to die tomorrow, how would I ever be able to thank all the people who have been so understanding and kind in helping me get through the last seven months. Then it hit me! I could write my thank you's in my journal.

First, I would like to thank the lady named Judy, for giving me the awareness that the Adult Education program existed.

I would then like to thank the Alberta Government for making funding available for this program, even though I disagree with a lot of their cutbacks. Thirdly, I would like to thank Barb, who was so seriously determined that I keep going despite all the problems over the past year. Her determination and drive will always be in my memory, along with the little pep talks she gave me.

Another person to whom I owe a great thank you to is Erin. This lady, I'm sure, had nightmares as to how she would get me through my math. If a person is willing to learn, Erin was willing to give 110% of her help.

Thankyou to Loree for her help in English. I'm sure there were times when I would start babbling with a pen, she would think that there wasn't enough margin to correct my mistakes.

These are the people that, to me, have made me a much more aware person, and with the help of their instruction, I now have a feeling of security, that I will succeed.

There is always a certain something or someone that, in one's heart, deserves the biggest thankyou. To me, this lady will always be special because when all the heavy loads of life fell upon me she was the one who listened and helped me in any way she could. Her awareness to detect the down days amazed me and her advice in sorting out my thoughts will always be remembered and greatly appreciated. Thank you Pat, for your guidance.

Please note, this is not a last testimony, but simply the way I feel. Have a great summer!"

Eric

"When I started in January I thought that it would only take until August until I got a certificate that was like a diploma and then sign up in Sept. for the Horticulture course. I did get worried over what I would do if I could not get in but you helped to solve that problem by allowing me to take more upgrading. I do have a question or two. Will this extra year get me my high school diploma? Will I be able to get into the Hort. Program next Sept? If so, when do I have to have my name on the registration list? ((Apply in December!))

I like and enjoy going to school in the morning as I look forward to it by Sunday night. There are new things to learn every day. Like today we cut open a heart. Now I knew

what a heart was and that it pumped blood but not what makes it work, the delicate but strong valve closures and the very fine nerves that make it beat.

I don't share too much with my family as they lose interest, after I start talking how my day was and they just have to tell me all about their aches, pains and how they worked during the day."

Hazel

E. Reflections on the Comments by the Instructor

The comments by the instructor most often fell into the categories of encouragement, clarification of issues, support and reassurance. As Mishra (1994) states, the instructor becomes a mentor and a coach, taking the time to work with the players on an individual basis to support and encourage growth. The written words between the students and instructors were shared openly and, yet, in confidence. I found, again, that encouragement and support are so important in the development of trust and I found many examples in the students' journals of instances when I, and other instructors, were able to provide a form of mentoring for them.

The following examples offer evidence of caring and individual attention modelled by instructors.

"When doing word problems have you asked Ken how best to approach them? 64% in math is not the end of the world - don't be so hard on yourself. Your reading will improve as you proceed in English. Keep up the Good Work!"

Laurence

"Never let yourself feel this way (that you will fail). Learning is difficult and we try and try until we are successful. You have only failed one test. You can rewrite it again - seek assistance and then try in a week.

Your confidence is building daily and I hope you keep saying upgrading is for "me" and "I'll" do it. You're wonderful!"

Pat

"You have an excellent attitude toward learning and to the program. Keep up the good work!"

Laurie

"You need to give yourself a pat on the back! I am proud of you! I am proud that you know how to work through your problems along with school!"

Roberta

"You are building self-confidence but the stress sometimes makes you feel insecure for awhile. There is nothing 'the matter with you!' You are an excellent student and an excellent person!"

Pat

"You need to go easy on yourself - you also have to give yourself - credit. You are a bright person! You will do well, keep calm and don't panic. Remember - attend classes, work hard at school - you will do well. Is everything alright at home? If not, come see me."

Kate

"I am glad you are able to keep going in school and not quit. Keep asking questions! Keep the smile - it is always great to see you in class!"

Pat

Coaches often have to give players direction and support to keep them on track. Because many of them were juggling school and family, students sometimes felt overwhelmed by

the pace. Coaching was an important way in which instructors were able to keep some students in the program. The following excerpts are fairly typical of the way instructors handles this difficult part of their work.

"I am sorry that you feel pushed but we have no choice. If you do not complete a course per semester the Student Finance Board may decide not to fund you.

In class, do you:

- 1) *Work steadily without interruptions?*
- 2) *Set goals and meet them?*
- 3) *Try to start and complete assignments without waiting for help?*
- 4) *Do at least 1 hour of homework per night?*

The Student Finance Board will not fund students who do not complete courses and attend regularly. They will question students and us if we do not push students to complete their programs. Come and see me and let's work out a schedule to complete your work on time."

Wendy

"Arrange a specific time & place to do your studies. How are your girls adjusting to you being in school? How are you finding the Biology course? You need to write out a schedule so that the course will be completed in a set time."

Francis

The journal entries from the instructor also included a time and place to organize and plan for the future. At times, program schedules and course choices were handled in the journal entries. Previously this type of discussion would have necessitated an appointment and office meeting. As the next example shows, instructors were willing to offer direction and opinion.

"We can look at Psychology but you are a bright and successful student, and Biology will get you into more careers. Do you want to try Biology and switch to Psych if you really don't like it? Is there any area of bio you really dislike - talk to Barb and you can do Psych but I would prefer you try to Biology."

Jane

The opportunity to engage in a dialogue about future planning allowed students to reflect on choices and to make informed decisions related to their goals. Encouragement from instructors that a student could succeed in the upper level courses was often required. Moving to high school sciences, for example, was a frightening experience for many upgrading students.

F. Reflection on Instructor Comments by the Students:

A daily dialogue journal is a two-way communication process, between student and instructor. Many students reflected on the instructors' comments, written and verbal,

that had proved helpful to them. In turn, this kind of communication confirmed for instructors that the journal process was beneficial for both parties. The following examples show the closeness that developed between instructors and students in the program.

"Yea, we are back to school after a good week off. I sure had a nice holiday, we went all the way to Vancouver. It sure would of been nicer if we would of had 2 weeks. My stay was short, it seemed like all we did was drive, but it was great. I was so anxious to get back to school I was even early this morning, can you believe that? I would also like to thank you for our little talk last week. You know I think if it wasn't for you I probably would of quit a month ago. When I come in to talk to you, you seem to give me that extra boost I need. I don't know what it is about me but I feel so insecure sometimes. Oh well, today is a good day and it's wonderful to be back."

Pat

"Thanks for the kind comments, Pat, from last weeks journal! It sure helped me feel better!"

This has turned out to be a pretty good week. I've been able to come home and get more school work done at night then what I do at school all day."

Theresa

"The time seems to go by so quickly from journal to journal. It is okay though, that only means that the time spent on courses goes by just as quick.

I am glad that you thought that my interview with Ken went well. Because I was not all that sure for myself. As I have said I really don't like confrontations of any kind. I sometimes find myself avoiding them. It's funny in a way because, way back in my life (about 100 years ago) no it was only 7 - 10 years ago, I used to be a Cadet. When I left the corps, I was Chief Petty Officer 1st class. Chief of the corps. I had to deal with many types of confrontations. Some worse than what I have to deal with now. I guess I still don't have my confidence back from being so isolated for the 2 years spent in Tuk. I'm sure as the days go by I will get better and better --- I hope."

Sara

Chapter 5

(1) Benefits of the Research

a) *The journal as a medium of personal and academic growth.*

The journal writing of students showed graphic evidence of improvements in their attitudes towards their own learning. Pat, for example, a thirty-five year old student, who had failed as a youngster in school was astonished that she could learn. Her journal is full of pep talks from the instructors asserting that, yes, she could learn and that, yes, she was doing extremely well in the program. Her journal entries were usually twenty to one hundred lines and the themes ranged from terrible insecurities regarding academics to relationship problems with her mate. The growth shown most clearly by Pat was that, through her dialogue, she began to problem solve. Test anxiety was a major issue with Pat and over the period of journal writing she was able to talk herself through these frightening experiences. As well, she requested that she be able to write her exams in a quiet place. In a classroom where this dialogue hadn't taken place I don't think Pat would have felt empowered enough to make such a request.

Pat was also keeping track of her academic progress in summary format in her binder. She was able to view her marks on an ongoing basis and this monitoring was a continual reminder of how well she was doing and constant affirmation that

she was a success. The journal helped her develop a voice which asked questions, shared insecurities, joys and successes. Pat entered the program at a basic level and in two and half years graduated with well over one hundred credits.

Laurie and Eric were a married couple in the program. They suffered through a bankruptcy, a pregnant teenager who had an abusive husband and a continuum of financial woes. Laurie's writings were inspirational to read as she was most often able to see a bright side. She rarely got down about the burdens of her life. The journal was her "quiet place" in which she could write down her troubles.

Towards the end of the journal writing she had clearly moved into planning for the future and, just as clearly, had moved from a reluctant learner to a self-directed learner. Laurie was able to monitor her progress and develop a career plan that suited her academic strengths. Laurie's feelings related to her being a reluctant learner and a victim of circumstance changed over the term she became a positive, self-motivated learner, a person doing something for herself and proud of it. In short, she was a happy person. Her life circumstances were the same but her attitude was different. To watch this growth and to coach her through difficult times was a rewarding experience. Laurie finished the courses and went onto another College program.

Eric was yet another remarkable person, in a group of remarkable people, and he wrote long and in- depth entries in his journal. He experienced all the same circumstances as Laurie but his approach at times was quite different. He was sometimes overwhelmed by his troubles and, after some of his writings, I would request an in-office visit. During some of these visits, referral sources were presented if he was depressed, or required legal counsel for his daughter, or needed directions to the food bank, or advice on where to obtain finances to keep the electricity on in their home. He was always grateful for the assistance and would bounce back with a positive attitude which would hold until the next crisis.

Eric's academic progress was amazing to him. He had never seen himself as a good writer but he was doing very well in English. By keeping a section in his binder in which he could record his grades, he was able to look back and feel great pride that he was doing well in all his courses. When Eric was down, he would look back at his grades and know that he was successful. Eric's journal was a tool that helped him solve both his personal and academic problems. As an instructor I was able to provide referral sources, tutorial advice and a listening ear. I always felt that coaching him through crises and offering him support was time well spent, as Eric was most appreciative and was a most positive influence on other students who were experiencing difficulties.

Sara was a single mom with one child. She felt that, academically, she was a poor student. Her journal entries started out in a very negative manner with complaints about course content, about not wanting to wait until others caught up, never having time with her daughter and the behavior of other students. Her early journal entries were a way for her to express anger about many elements of her life. As her grades improved, after she began to tackle some of her personal issues, the tone of her journal entries began to move towards a more positive outlook on life. She was able to choose a career path that she was motivated towards and as she became more self-confident her attitude continued to improve.

The journal entries were the medium through which the students began to draw pictures of their lives and reflect upon how these pictures would change in the future. On another level, the journal entries were a way of offering individualized instruction and coaching for twenty-one students. In the end, journal binders became portfolios of each student's year, with grades which reflected academic growth and extensive documentation of issues and challenges which reflected personal growth. All the students in the program were on a path towards personal and academic awareness and were able to explore their learning and their personal growth in a climate of trust, support, and growing responsibility.

b) *The Journal as “Connection of Voice” - Putting the Personal into the Academic Voice*

One major benefit of journal writing for both instructor and student is the connection of voice. I truly knew and understood the students I was working with on an individual basis. At times I did feel overwhelmed when reading about issues that students were faced with on a daily basis; but I knew that the greatest assistance I could provide was to coach students through their difficulties. Most often, I read the journal entries at least two times. The first reading was to develop an understanding of the writing and the second reading was to provide the written comments.

As the experience developed the important thing for me was to provide a space in which students could be open and honest, with themselves and with me. In turn I was required to be open and honest with them. I felt the need to make all my comments as nonjudgemental and positive as I could.

The time involved in reading and responding to a journal varied from fifteen to thirty minutes. It took me, on average, about ten hours every two weeks to keep in touch with all students. Previously, I would have spent 20-30 hours meeting with students individually over a two week span and would probably not have met with all of the students. Through journals, I was much more aware of

academic progress than I could ever have been otherwise and I could assist in program placement more easily because there was a clear record of progress to which I could refer at any time.

c) ***The Journal as a Record Keeper for Personal and Academic Growth***

Another unintended yet productive outcome of this experience was the development of a portfolio. Through reflecting on skills, abilities and attitudes in their journals, these adult students had developed the first steps in putting together their learning portfolio. The portfolio was an accumulation of academic progress, understanding of their personal growth and reflections on past experiences. The learning binder that held their journals provided the record the students needed to develop a portfolio. As well, the learning journal became a "pride book" as students were able to see their progress by referring back to the binder.

By reflecting upon their life experiences and life objectives students began to view their lives with a fuller understanding and clearer recognition of what they had previously done, what they were currently involved in and what they would like to be doing in the future. All students became aware of importance of reflecting on their life experiences, both academic and personal, and taking action based on what they were learning about themselves.

(2) What are the Limitations?

Because the study was not identified as a research project from the outset it lacked some of the planning and control of variables that would normally be required. There are several limitations in this study that would need to be addressed in any future research of this kind. They include the following:

1. All students should write a consistent number of entries.
2. There should be a definite project design from the outset and an ongoing process for the collection of data.
3. There should be planned interview times to discuss personal and academic growth in groups and individually.
4. Instructors should maintain journals, too.
5. There should be a limit on the number of journals for which each instructor is responsible.

Coding and interpretation of data on an ongoing basis would decrease the large amount of time it took to read and code journals in the initial study. In another study, it might be interesting to present other learning journal options to students, such as presenting their entries on audio tape or through personal interview. This would allow students to present their journals in ways that would be most comfortable for them.

In almost every case the researcher became very familiar with the student. Some students in a future study might not appreciate this. Students should always be given the right to opt out of such a project. In this initial project all students willingly agreed to be participants in the study, but the study of documents did not begin until after all the journal entries were completed.

Chapter 6

Summary

(1) **Impact of Writing in the Journal for Coordinators and Students:**

The students' writing in journals kept me in touch with their voices. In the combined role of coordinator and instructor, many times I have felt so overwhelmed with timetabling, grading, exam schedules and staff supervision, that my students (the real reason we are here) do not get enough individual time.

In this program, I "listened" to the students' voices through their writing every two weeks and was able to discuss, support and encourage them. Often I felt like a silent coach, coaching from the sidelines, giving hints, providing ideas, and giving encouragement. Watching the team members grow and develop towards their personal goals was my coach's reward.

The journal writings shared many personal issues related to finances, family, relationships and health. These issues were a reminder to me that the lives of many of the upgrading students are very complicated and that school is not their only focus. Most student entries became more personal after two or three entries. Students shared personal information most frequently when seeking advice on how to deal with problems. Sometimes I could see the development of critical thinking skills in a journal entry when

students would begin by writing out a problem and end with a very viable solution. They were often able to recognize the issues, provide solutions and move forward. Dealing with personal issues and often coming to a resolution provided momentum, both personally and academically. Through journalling, many students were provided support and received referrals to counselling, financial assistance, child care providers and tutors. Frequently, the students' voices were shared quietly as they were coached through a personal crisis. Sometimes the journal writing prompted an individual session to discuss matters that the coordinator and/or student felt had to be discussed further.

A benefit to me as the Coordinator/Instructor was that through my awareness of personal matters I could better understand the reasons why a student might be absent and away for a few days. While the journals took a lot of time for reading and writing, I was able to do this during a quiet time away from the busy office. I was able to give uninterrupted time to the journals because they were so portable. Another advantage was that by writing in the journals, students could draw my attention to their concerns without appearing at my door (as previous students had done.) Students began to solve problems on their own and then write in their journal how they had done so.

Finally, the journal entries provided a constant, silent reminder that upgrading students are different from the normal college student who has just left home to pursue a new

career. The barriers that these upgrading students were overcoming on their road to success were much more difficult than those that most college students face.

I truly felt I was being useful as a coach and mentor, and I was very proud as these students succeeded in their learning endeavors. No one in this group of students left the program because he or she had failed. By the end of the journalling process I felt I had a clear picture of my students and as well, I had many new friends. This group of students had become more than names in a class; they were my friends, many of whom I often see even now, four years after the journal project. In a hectic time in the college environment, I was able to be the "person" I believe I am and communicate in ways in which I have always wanted to communicate with the my students in the classroom. This sharing of voice was as positive for me as it was for the students of academic upgrading.

(2) Recommendations for journal writing in the future with students.

When implementing journal writing with upgrading students in the future, I would:

- a) Present a preliminary session to students on the journal process.
- b) Provide a more thorough guide on expectations and time lines. Examples of different kinds of entries would assist the reluctant writers in the beginning stages of writing. I would set time lines so that students would always know the

specific dates to hand in their entries and the dates they would be returned.

(Appendix 3)

- c) I think an instructor should work with no more than twenty students in journal writing.
- d) All new students in our upgrading program should engage in journalling with the coordinator.
- e) The journalling process should be used selectively and purposefully in subject-related areas to assist students in reflective practice that can lead to academic and personal growth.

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APPENDIX "1"

June 28, 1994

Dr. Robert Runte
Chairperson
Faculty of Education
Human Subject Research Committee
University of Lethbridge

Dear Dr. Runte,

Pat Bidart has presented her research request to me as the Dean of her department. We have discussed the necessity of volunteers and permission requests to go out to the students. I know that Pat will not have problems getting students to volunteer and that students would not feel that they have to participate.

I believe that this research proposal will be a very useful project and will benefit both students and instructors involved in the reflective process of learning.

If you have any questions or concerns that you would like to clarify, please feel free to contact me.

Yours truly,

Dr. Ralph Levinson
Dean
Academic and Support Programs
(403)556-8346

APPENDIX "2"

Dear Student,

I would like to conduct a study on the use of journal writing and portfolio assessments with adult students. The purpose of this study is to determine if these are useful tools when working with adult students in an upgrading situation.

I would like permission to borrow and use your journals at the end of the term. This is totally voluntary and you are free to choose not to participate. If you do choose to participate these journals will be returned to you during the fall semester. All information will be handled in a confidential and professional manner. Further, all names, locations and any other identifying information will not be included (unless requested by the student) in any discussion of the results. You may withdraw or request that your information be removed from the study at any time.

I very much appreciate your assistance in this study. If you have any questions please feel free to call me at 556-8365 (work) or 227-3948 (home). Also, feel free to contact the supervisor of my study, Dr. David Townsend (329-2731) and/or any member of the University of Lethbridge, Faculty of Education Human Subject Research Committee if you wish additional information. The chairperson of the committee is Dr. Robert Runte (329-2454).

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Bidart
Olds College
556 8365

(Please detach and forward the signed portion)

I, _____, give Pat Bidart permission to use my journal and/or portfolio assessment as part of her research study. I understand that this is voluntary involvement and I may withdraw from the study at any time.

Name

Signature

Date

I, _____, would/would't want my name used in the research acknowledgements.

Name

Signature

Date

APPENDIX "3"

Career and Academic Preparation

Learning Journal

- A) **The Learning Journal** is designed as a reflective tool to review and discuss your experience both learning and personal in your academic upgrading program. The Learning Journal provides students an opportunity to "apply" what they've learned to their own lives. A Journal provides for self-exploration, self-discovery and encourages students to think and require an articulation of their thoughts.
- B) **Materials Required:**
- Separate Notebook
- C) **Journal Expectations:**
- Four or five sentences minimum per entry.
 - Focus writing on anything relating to your learning experiences of the past week: ie. comments regarding academic progress, personal issues which may be affecting your programs, or questions regarding your program.
 - An entry per day of classes.
 - The journal is to be handed in each Friday and will be returned on Mondays.
 - A completed journal will be used towards your bonus assignments.

D) Examples of Journal Writing:

- **Example 1**

September 11

Today I wrote a math test and got 85%. This is the best I have ever done in my life. My children are adapting to Olds but I am having trouble finding afterschool care. Any ideas? When will the funding person be in again?

E) Fulwiler (1987) describes the characteristics of good journals as follows:

1. Observations: Writers see something of interest and attempt to capture it in language.
2. Questions: Writers use journals to formulate and record questions, personal doubts, academic queries, questions of fact, administration and theory. It is more important here, that there be questions than that yet there be answers.
3. Speculations: Writers wonder aloud, on paper, about the meaning of events, issues, facts, readings, patterns, interpretations, problems and solutions. The journal is the place to try out without fear of penalty; the evidence of the attempt is the value here.
4. Self-awareness: Writers become conscious of who they are, what they stand for, how and why they differ from others.

5. Digression: Writers despairing from what they intend to say, sometimes to think of personal matters and sometimes to connect apparently disparate pieces of thought.
6. Synthesis: Writers putting together ideas, finding relationships, connecting one course or topic with another.
7. Revision: Writers looking back at prior entries, realizing they have changed their minds, and using the journal to update and record their later thoughts.
8. Information: Does the journal contain evidence that reading has been done, lectures listened to, facts and theories understood? (p. 2)