

**ABOUTREACH: ONE PRACTITIONER'S NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF
TEACHING IN A SECONDARY OUTREACH SCHOOL IN RURAL ALBERTA**

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to my family and its multitude of extensions including friends, colleagues, and students who lent me moments from their lives.

Abstract

This project is about teaching in an Outreach school in rural Alberta. It is a personal, narrative journey that reflects on theoretical practice and the pedagogical shifts that I made as I came to further understand my teaching practices in an outreach school. My focus is not on the story itself but on the reflections that are generated by the story. It is my hope that these reflections will further the conversation about outreach education at the school, jurisdictional, and provincial levels. My work in outreach education has changed me. I have witnessed a shift in my pedagogical focus and so I set out to find the *Why*. For this project I decided to sift through my journal writings, notes, and gifts of words from students, colleagues and professors. I looked at the changes I have made at the school and what impact the process has had on me. I wrote about the stories of my professional growth and on what is at the heart of teaching in an outreach school.

Preface

An Exchange of Gifts

As long as you read this poem
I will be writing it.
I am writing it here and now
before your eyes,
although you can't see me.
Perhaps you'll dismiss this
as a verbal trick,
The joke is you're wrong;
the real trick
is your pretending
this is something
fixed and solid,
external to us both.
I tell you better:
I will keep on
writing this poem for you
even after I'm dead.

-Alden Nowlan

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Dr. David Townsend who helped me start, finish and celebrate my journey, Dr. Leah Fowler for helping me find the words, and the Foothills School Division and the University of Lethbridge for recognizing the professional strength that can be achieved through a cohort program.

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Background to the Project

Lori's Story

I quit school in grade ten. Although I was a student who usually got “A’s” in school, grade ten was difficult for me. Life was difficult. My parents were divorcing for the second time and I felt unloved and abandoned. I started to hang around peers who felt the same. Destruction set in and disappearing seemed to be the best solution. I explained to the principal and vice principal that I needed a break from school, the vice-principal tried to convince me to stay. He knew me, and he understood what I was going through. The principal was new to the community and to the school. He saw me as trouble, as the person who skipped class and was mouthy to adults. He signed the papers for me to quit school at the age of fifteen. My mom was furious, but conceded. I told her not to worry and that I would have my career by the time I was twenty-one. I was wrong; I was twenty.

For the next few years I held down small paying jobs, sometimes three at a time. Moving out of town and on my own at the age of sixteen meant working menial jobs, but I felt in control of my life, making my own decisions. Seeing those around me stuck in low-end jobs and heading nowhere made me realize that change was necessary if my life was to get any better. Education was going to be the impetus for change but I had to learn to become responsible for getting my own education and to be motivated to learn. I had just been laid off when I found out about an upgrading program being offered through the Camrose Lutheran College (now Augustana). Instead of going on employment insurance I was placed in a federal program called Manpower. The program was designed to help people get the education they need while providing minimal living

expenses. The school was housed in an old car dealership. The program was self-paced but required mandatory attendance to maintain funding. I was the youngest student at eighteen, with the oldest student being sixty. Soon I was able to surpass where I had left off when I quit school. There was not enough time to get a diploma but I did have the motivation to continue. Calgary and Alberta Vocational College (now Bow Valley) were my next stops. Although a grade twelve diploma still eluded me, I had enough to get into college and achieve a successful career in radio at the age of twenty. From radio I went into television and then onto media and public relations. After I was laid off, I turned again to education. I went applying to university as a mature student and convocated with distinction. I also managed to author educational interactive software programs and work on a virtual school project before beginning teaching in 1995.

In 1997 my teaching focus shifted from the classroom to examining Alberta's way of educating youth. I was hired to help create Education Plus, a public Outreach high school with the Foothills School Division that offers an alternative approach to education. The focus is on working with Outreach students, and offering a program similar to what I had experienced in Camrose but had forgotten about. Immersed in Outreach education as a teacher this time, I have had the opportunity to learn about educating beyond the typical classroom teaching role. I have evolved pedagogically and I feel the story of my journey now needs to be told.

Outreach Education

Alternative high school programs are not new to Alberta. In 1991 Alberta Learning (then Alberta Education) released a draft profile of 21 dropout prevention programs in the province. One of the programs was The Alternative High School in

Calgary, established in 1974, and described as the oldest alternative school in the province (p. 24). Alberta's educational scene has been home to many stay-in-school initiatives and drop out prevention programs. Social skills development, mentoring, parent in-service, achievement recovery, young mother programs, tutorial, peer support, re-entry programs, and alternative schools are just some of them. Most have been focussed on getting students to re-enter the traditional system.

Outreach education is seen as another alternative school designed to keep secondary students in school so that they can complete their education. Such schools and programs can be found throughout the province. There are differences between them and others, however. Outreach schools are required to meet the legislative and policy standards associated with being a school. Outreach programs are considered an extension of the local high school but must be offered in a stand-alone facility, separate from a building already being used as a school. Today, there are ninety-two Outreach schools or programs in Alberta, with more being developed as an educational alternative for students.

Alberta Learning defines Outreach students as those being *at risk* of not completing their education. Students have to have been out of school for at least six months and be *unable* to be successful in the traditional school. In a 1998 draft, Alberta Learning attempted to redefine Outreach programs and Outreach students because the programs themselves were changing with student need. Outreach programs are now seen as alternatives for students who, due to individual circumstances, find that a traditional school does not meet their needs. Outreach programs have been providing students with a flexible approach to teaching and learning through recognizing individual needs. They

have increased student access to resources to improve their ability academically and socially.

As a result of a 1998 open discussion between Alberta's Outreach teachers and Alberta Learning, provincial conditions for funding required that Outreach students be given access to personal and career counseling, conflict resolution, life skills, anger management training and study skills or other services important to their needs. In recognition of the increased costs associated with a stand-alone facility and the smaller number of credits earned by Outreach students, Alberta Learning increased funding for the first four hundred credit earned units (CEUs). The enhanced funding is for high school students only. However, some Outreach programs do work with elementary and junior high students who are unable to learn effectively in a traditional program.

The Project

The impetus for this project was my personal desire to open up new dialogue around teaching in an Outreach school. Outreach education is unique, just as secondary, elementary and virtual education are. Outreach educators can be called independent learning instructors, mediators of curriculum, or learning strategists who develop self-reliant learners. By focussing on what it means to teach in an Outreach school in Alberta, I hoped to provide a platform for conversation that would generate more insight into the profession and promote the idea of greater recognition for Outreach education at the post secondary level (see Appendix A for sample letter to Deans of Education).

This project has become a personal, narrative journey that reflects on theoretical practice and the pedagogical shifts that I have made as I have come to further understand my teaching practices in an Outreach school. My focus is not on the story

itself but on the reflections that are generated by the story. It is my hope that these reflections will further the conversation about Outreach education at the school, jurisdictional, and provincial levels. My work in Outreach education has changed me. I have witnessed a shift in my pedagogical focus and so, through this project, I set out to find the *Why*. As I looked through my journal writings, notes, and gifts of words from students, colleagues and professors, I looked at the changes I made at the school and what impact the process has had on me. After writing about the stories of my professional growth, and what I feel is at the heart of teaching in an Outreach school, I reflected on those decisions and how they have changed my teaching practices. I also found recurring themes such as judgement and guilt, and I discovered new insights as I journeyed through my stories and my reflections to make the connection between who I am and what I do.

Back in 1997 when I was hired to create Education Plus I had no idea I was about to embark on such a journey. My permanent teaching certificate had just arrived when I was asked to join the team to help create the first Outreach school for the Foothills School Division in Southern Alberta. Prior to teaching I had worked in the media and public relations fields. When I moved to High River my teaching background involved educating a diverse group of junior high students on a native reserve and teaching in a piloted cyber school. Fortunately, my two teaching experiences helped me to see outside the box into a world of alternative approaches to education. Working with a variety of at-risk youth issues, modifying curriculum and programs, facilitating peer education, doing public relations, and having media experience certainly provided an important backdrop to the success of Education Plus. My enrolment in The University of Lethbridge M.Ed program gave me the opportunity to look over the past four years of professional

engagement within an Outreach school and to recognize how I have grown considerably as a teacher and, more importantly, as a human being.

My background plays a key role in how I work with Outreach students at Education Plus. My story is much like those of many of the students who come into the school. Some are struggling with incidents in their lives, and see education as irrelevant until they are able to deal with more urgent things. Other students are coming in to get the upgrading they need in order to move on with their lives. There is also a new type of student coming to Education Plus; students who want to fast track their education to get to where they want to be quicker. The school evolves as the students evolve. I believe Outreach education is at the forefront of change in the educational system in Alberta.

After I was offered the job to start setting up an Outreach high school in High River, Alberta, I began conducting field research. There were many Outreach schools in Alberta willing to share their stories of what they did successfully and the challenges they faced. The practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1981) that was being collected provided beneficial information but also made important connections that would help me and my students as I generated and reacted to changes in later years at Education Plus. Teachers in other Outreach schools offered advice and narrative collaboration through e-mails or phone calls and helped shaped my own approach to Outreach education.

I have always been a gatherer. When I go for a walk, I stop when something catches my eye. A marking on a rock, a feather, or an interesting stick can make their way to my home based on the connection I feel with the object. I am also the same way when it comes to knowledge. I gather up bits that appeal to me and try to connect them with what I am doing or struggling through at the time. When I searched for information

on how to run an Outreach school, I integrated the best knowledge and practices that I thought would fit in with my philosophy and help me create the atmosphere I felt I wanted to try.

My first year at Education Plus involved a huge learning curve for me. I only had two years of teaching experience and was hired to learn about, coordinate, administer, and teach in an Outreach school. Fortunately, there was another teacher and an educational assistant who primarily does the secretarial work on the team. However, four years later I am the only teacher at Education Plus with a fluctuating student population of 205. There is still one educational assistant but she has more secretarial work to do too. Originally the principal was shared with the local high school. Today there is one principal assigned to Outreach education and all of the other alternative programs and schools for the Division. For the most part, in the beginning, it was up to the teaching staff and the assistant to discover what Education Plus would look like, what Outreach education was, how the funding worked, and how to run an effective program.

The Foothills School Division had stressed that it was up to the team members to create a clientele and to operate the school. I was excited at the prospect of generating something new and took the challenge of operating an Outreach school as a unique opportunity to broaden my teacher knowledge. For the success of the students and the school, teaching in Outreach meant having to learn about administration, government policies, funding, individualized and independent learning, solution-focussed therapy, career counselling, curriculum development, social services, community support, and about myself. The insular classroom was gone. I had to take on all of the roles that occur in a traditional setting, and more. My definition of teaching changed and so did my

measurement of success. Starting up and working in Education Plus has allowed me to become adventurous in my own learning and growth.

The school is a success. Education Plus started with 16 students in 1997 and by the end of the 2000/2001 school year we had worked with 205 students who took 496 courses (see Appendix B). In the first year of operating the school, my time was spent learning about the business of education and discerning what I felt met the needs of the teenagers that I work with in High River. In subsequent years, I have learned to act on changing what does not work, celebrate what does, and share what I have learned about coordinating Education Plus and teaching Outreach youth in High River, Alberta.

Purpose and Focus of the Project

In coming to choose what to do for my final project I knew the focus had to be on Outreach education but, since there is so much to tell, I was not sure how begin. I started with my usual pattern of gathering details and wandered through the pages of past courses in the Master's program. The term *Outreach* is a relatively new piece of phraseology used in Alberta's educational field. Barth (1991), Davies (1980), Dixon (1992), Gatto (1992), Hansen and Childs (1998), Hargreaves and Fullan(1998), Kronick and Hargis (1990), and Housego (1990) are among many authors who provide varied documentation of working with at-risk youth, self-directed learning, and individualized programming. Some of the writings of these authors encouraged me to reflect on how Education Plus and Outreach teaching fit into past and present working models.

When I searched for the term Outreach in education I obtained web sites, journal articles, and texts on Outreach programs in post secondary institutions. From what I found, the term Outreach meant an off-campus approach. I was, however, looking for more than just a delivery method. Since 1974, Outreach has generally referred to increasing the use and accessibility of services to the community (Housego, 1999). In this case, the term is parallel to what Outreach education does: reaching out to students to improve their access to education. Outreach schools are not new to Alberta, yet there has not been a lot of research done about them. I was disappointed when doing my research that I could not find any other references to what I thought I practiced. My disappointment did not last long because I recognized the unique opportunity that I have to contribute new knowledge about teaching in an Outreach school to my profession.

Kronick and Hargis (1990) studied the Alternative Center for in Knoxville,

Tennessee from 1987 to 1989. Although the student demographics varied from those at Education Plus, there were similarities in family structure, age, and educational background. They concluded that individualized instruction was the key to the school's academic success, meaning that students have their own education plan and teachers know the educational reason for each student participating in the learning process, including the students' level of learning. Other significant components of the school's success were the guidance program and the commitment to the emotional wellbeing of the staff. Kronick and Hargis's findings are directly in line with what makes Education Plus a success in that students' educational goals are individualized according to where the student is hoping to go.

I believe strongly in the Education Plus philosophy. It addresses the person within the student through a flexible and student-centered environment. The school reaches out to help with what the student is ready to receive. After teaching for four years at Education Plus, I have come to see the strength in providing choices for students and to recognize my own right to choose. My philosophy has changed. I have evolved. Even while creating this project I had to revisit my educational philosophies. Through my continuing search for dialogue and knowledge, there has been a journey into the heart of teaching in an Outreach school, which has solidified my belief in the importance of Outreach education.

I have provided a map through the sections of the professional, pedagogical, and personal journey I have traveled over the past four years. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) write about the importance of the narrative, viewing education as the construction and reconstruction of stories. My growth began with a search for the stories and the wisdom

of those who had walked the path before me. I learned from what they shared and, now, find that my role has changed. There is affirmation of my work as other professionals involved in Outreach education are now seeking out my stories. One colleague told me he keeps his notes on what I have said and he uses them as his bible as he seeks to make change at his Outreach school. Where I once was a listener, I am now the storyteller.

There are many layers of growth to be uncovered. When I was asked to write a metaphor for David Townsend's 5500 class in the spring of 1999, the layers of the Earth were chosen to represent my career and growth from the ground and moving up. As the earth is made of layers, so am I. The many layers signify the changes I have made, each professional development a piece of the landscape that comes together to form a whole. The opportunity to gather up information and seek answers to my many questions has helped me evolve as I have contributed to the creation of a successful school for Outreach students. The Foothills School Division has allowed me to explore the possibility of change and the autonomy to adapt pedagogy according to my students' needs. Although Education Plus has been operating for over four years, many of my colleagues in the Foothills School Division and members of the broader education community do not always understand what really happens at the school. I have always felt Outreach education needs a stronger voice. Accordingly, an important purpose of this project is to advance the understanding of Outreach education to colleagues, administrators and other educational officials.

Literature Review

The Need for Outreach Education

The need for Outreach education is increasing. In the September, 2001 report from Alberta Learning Removing Barriers to High School Completion, several issues were raised. Factors associated with early school leaving were found to be student-related, school-related or a combination of school-related, community-related, and student-related. The findings are similar to those brought forward by Benson (1990), who identified three categories of external assets for alternative schools: support, control and structured use of time. Characteristics of early school leavers (dropouts) were analyzed and it was found that only 35.5 % of students completing 14 and 24 streams in Alberta completed high school and of the 35.5%, only 55.8% completed on time (p. 6). High school graduates between the ages of 19 to 24 were seen as making substantial gains. Hahn, quoted by Kronick and Hargis (1990) does not see early school leavers exclusive to students who could not learn or were attending low level classes. He suggests that, while the use of statistics derived from twelfth grade graduates subtracted from ninth grade intake can be effective, random in and out migration, death, early graduation, and transfers must also be taken into consideration (p. 65).

Alberta Learning wants to improve high school completion by 19-year-old students from the current 70 per cent to 75 per cent. In order to increase graduation rates, Alberta Learning will probably rely even more on Outreach education to provide program flexibility and give greater access and choice to Alberta students. Alternative students will require programs that offer an alternative learning climate. A positive school climate is one that the student considers to be caring and encouraging according to Benson (1990)

who notes that “one of the new-universal characteristics of young people is a sense of uncertainty about the world and their place in it” (p. 3.) Instead of surrounding students with criticism and failure, Outreach offers a program where youth are, as Benson states, reassured of being capable, worthwhile and able to meet school with success.

While Dixon (1992) concurs with many of the reasons stated in the Alberta Ministry document why students become dropouts he does see the need to acknowledge legitimate dropouts: those who get more satisfaction and success at work than at school. Dixon believes that these students have a “right to quit school just as adults have the right to quit jobs that are not right for them” (p. 229). I agree that there needs to be a better support system to help such students find housing, training and jobs. Forcing students to remain in a system that is only adding to their sense of failure is counterproductive.

Alberta Learning (2001) recognizes the effectiveness of the Outreach programs for students (p. 13). Much of what Outreach education does is already meeting many of the outcomes that the government is hoping to achieve. Flexibility, putting students before curriculum, offering learning opportunities harmonious with learning styles, welcoming environments, and helping with career planning are embedded in the daily operations of Outreach programming. Outreach education is leading the way to alternative approaches and paradigm shifts. Four of the focus groups mentioned in the Alberta Learning Report called for expanding support for Outreach programs as a “model of program flexibility that is working for many students” (p. 15). Outreach programs are known to be effective in supporting students at risk of leaving school early.

Although Alberta Learning acknowledges that the Report points to substantive, systemic change, the onus is on the jurisdiction to address the suggested outcomes. As

well, the need to increase high school completion rates is seen by the government as necessary for global competition. “By achieving improved high school completion rates, a significant contribution would be made to making Alberta an attractive place to invest because of its world class labour force” (p. 8). High school completion rates alone do not make Alberta a better investment. Creating mature and motivated students does. Dixon (1992) believes that if we remedy the causes of dropping out we may also remedy most causes of delinquency, and it “will be cost-effective” (p. 229.) A new model of schooling must be implemented to give students more power over their education, something which Outreach programming has been doing for years. If Alberta Learning and school jurisdictions are looking to Outreach education to help improve high school completion rates, then further study on Outreach education is required.

Alternative Implications

Outreach education moves beyond a simple change in delivery method. To be successful, an Outreach program must embrace pedagogical shifts that take account of organizational, instructional, resource and operational concerns. Alternative approaches must be broad enough to include the problems of coping with a variety of students (Davies, 1980.) Staffing is utilized differently. The way students are processed has to suit their sometimes-transient nature, and the teaching and learning materials used must be suited to the delivery format of Outreach flexibility. In traditional schools, many teachers can take information and dispense it to the students (Davies, 1980). In most Outreach schools, the teacher organizes the information and provides guidance but does not impose the information. Working in the Outreach educational field forces teachers and administration to do things differently.

In addition to the delivery of information, the role of the Outreach teacher is one of tutor, marker and counsellor. If students are going to be successful in an Outreach format, they have to be dedicated, motivated, and able to work on their own. Many Outreach students are in such programs because they lack some of those very qualities they need to make them successful. Most of the staff's time is spent on counselling students and tracking students to help them be successful. Individual guidance and monitoring requires time and patience. Student numbers do not allow conventional methods to work and the physical task of monitoring and controlling progress of students becomes complex (Davies, 1980.) The less mature the student is, the more important the tracking and counselling are for that student to succeed.

Another implication that Davies points to is that the more widely viable an alternative approach becomes, the more demands will be placed on the school and on the staff. Some Outreach schools are becoming victims of their own success, as they become a popular choice for students looking for alternatives without being given the staff to handle the workload. The "monumental lie", as Dixon (1992, p. 453) calls it, is in the ability of teachers to maintain a close relationship with students while constantly trying to deal with all of the teaching, administrative, and counselling work that is required.

Methodology

Collecting the Stories

My first two years of working involved equal portions of learning and anxiety at Education Plus. The best thing to happen was the master's program as it took me to a higher level of understanding of why I do what I do. The school became my learning lab and my university courses have been the catalyst. After actively analyzing my beliefs about youth, how to work with them, and what it means to be a good human being, I was able to put into words what I was sensing. I believe there is *truth* to be found on the pages of what I have written about in the stories.

I started to collect the record of my journey early in my masters' degree. Ever since, I have been steadily writing and reflecting on many experiences, including what has been happening to me professionally. The act of observance has considerable power (Moore, 1994) and I have been more cognizant of the changes I have been going through. My base of inquiry has been mainly the stories scattered throughout my experiences in teaching and running the Outreach school. I reflected on the pedagogical elements that are involved in what makes Education Plus a viable alternative for high school students in the Foothills School Division. Like Zola (1988) I have found that a good way for teachers to learn is through an examination of their own understandings and practices. Bits of stories jotted down on bits of paper, written in journals and sent through emails from work to home have served as the basis for many of the reflections in this project. Notes from students, letters from colleagues, emails from around the world, my notes to myself, and other pieces of my story have also been collected and analyzed. The

University courses and my professional development in Outreach education came together at the right time and gave me a wonderful opportunity for reflective growth.

Narrative inquiry, as discussed by major researchers such as Elbaz (1981), Fowler (2001), Goodson (1991), Ayers (1992), Connelly (1990), and Clandinin (1990), is the method I chose to discover more about myself as an Outreach educator. During the writing process I gathered information about what I wanted to do, visualized the outcome in my head, and went over what I wanted to say to be sure that what was said was truly how I felt at that time. I had agreed with the authors that a higher level of understanding is achieved when writing my own truths because personal stories uncover layers of truth.

Many of the truths were unexpected (Fowler, 2001) but from the unexpected comes growth. Ayers (1992) sees stories as a source of strength to generate change and my story is a source of affirmation about what I do and what other Outreach educators do. This method is not easy because there are layers of reflections. The *truth* forced me to question my own beliefs. At times, I felt as if I was cutting through my own core to get to the underlying layers. Outreach educators are a unique brand of teachers who have to deal with diverse situations and who are involved in changing the way public education is viewed and offered in Alberta. We are in the lead of changing what is considered a *normal* delivery method of education to high school students.

My History of Writing

I have always been a writer. That is to say, I have always used writing as a means of expressing what is happening to me. I remember sitting at my grandmother's house, typing away on her typewriter, shifting the keys for the ribbon colors, running the paper through the roller, and pressing hard on the letter e, worn from over use and requiring

much pressure in order to appear on the paper. I still have that typewriter and its case, and I still have the poem that I wrote to my grandmother for Valentine's Day at the age of eight. As a teenager, I wrote elongated odes filled with angst and yearning for what was lacking, and I challenged my peers to give me a topic for a poem to match the mood. I found I could connect to a place within, where the words and emotions to express my ideas through the pieces that I was composing were found. I remember writing to my father the day I moved out of the house, putting into words what would help him realize his alcoholism, help him to see clearly, and to love me. His response was anger but my own sense of being was solidified in writing what I saw then as truth. Writing is a way for me to express my inner truths outwardly. I provide the means for me to delve into past emotions and to process events. What I feel or sense comes out on the pages. In making the story tangible, I also make it more real and, in turn, I experience more self-discovery.

I remember writing the story my grandfather told to me one day over lunch in my grandparents' home. The table was pushed up against the wall with enough chairs to sit three. I was in university and I was down for a visit that was sure to provide clean laundry, some Kraft Dinner and fifty bucks. I asked my grandfather to tell me the story about his immigration to Canada from Denmark and how he came to meet grandma. I did not know when he began his story that he would get so emotional and that it would be the last time we would chat about his life. That story was always close to my heart and put it to paper when he died. The fear of losing who I was necessitated making grandpa's story real. My own sense of self was connected to his story. Afterwards, notebook and pen would always appear whenever I came home to visit and my grandmother tell me her

stories of growing up in Southern Alberta. I share these stories with a smile at the past, knowing that I am connected to a rich narrative.

Narrative Inquiry

My connection to the narrative and the process of writing made narrative inquiry the *only* methodology for me to use in my project. I found an essence of realness within the writing and the process that enabled me to make continuing connections. I became focussed on what I was writing and, through that level of concentration, was taken to a new awareness that may not have been reached otherwise. Storytelling was a way to help me see the themes that surrounded my myths and my truths as I worked to find meaning (Moore, 1994). Writing the stories of what I do at Education Plus allowed me to uncover new layers and discover other connections, thus improving my own practical knowledge (Elbaz, 1981.)

My ability to progress as a teaching professional in the area of Outreach education stems partially from hearing the stories of others. I have gained a tremendous amount of knowledge from teachers' narratives and experiences, and still continue to seek advice about how to improve what I do at Education Plus. The Outreach Educators' Network (OEN) is a committee made up of provincial representatives from various Outreach schools or programs. One of their mandates is to hold an annual Outreach Educators' conference. At the Outreach Educators' Conferences, the most frequent comment made to the steering committee (on which I sit) is how valuable the sharing of stories is to the teachers and staff attending the conference. Elbaz (1981) proposes that the work of teaching be viewed as a particular type of knowledge where a variety sources are drawn from in order to deal with tasks and problems. My knowledge grew from the stories of

others. Through the stories shared about the students at Education Plus further insights are presented for those who are seeking to start their own programs and for schools looking for ideas to improve their services to students.

I am often contacted by various superintendents, principals, teachers, counsellors, and parents who are trying to find out what Education Plus is and what Outreach education is all about. I believe many of the answers can be found in my stories of what happens at Education Plus and how certain situations and issues are handled. Stories are a means of capturing a richness and indeterminacy of teachers' experiences, along with the complexity of teaching (Carter, 1993.) "Story has become...a central focus for conducting research in the field" (p. 5.) Telling stories is also therapeutic. Great teaching grows out of a clear and often reinvented sense of self as the narratives chronicle the creation of a better self and better teacher.

Each of us is moving and changing with respect to others. As I discover new things, I remember old stories and, in the remembering, I discover again. Writing leads to self-knowledge, and in knowing comes the ability to recognize how to respond to students and the situations they bring to the school. As well, self-knowledge is a key facet of understanding because it demands self-consciously questioning of understandings in order to advance them. Since the purpose of this project was to provide insight into what makes Education Plus a viable choice for students in the Division, I chose the method deliberately. Narrative inquiry has allowed me to explore and search for new meaning and to raise questions for other educators about their own practices.

Most of us tell stories. We tell them for different purposes, perhaps to test reactions, to process ideas, or to simply act on an opportunity to be heard. A great deal of

my time is spent listening to the stories of my students. Their stories are told through their actions, how they move physically, what they write in their assignments, and what I hear in conversation. My work with Education Plus and with the Masters program at The University of Lethbridge has helped to solidify my beliefs in the power of story. The practice of journalizing what happens at Education Plus and then reflecting on the outcomes empowers me, promotes action, and filters down to what I help the students learn to see themselves.

Willinsky (1989) acknowledges the importance of teacher narrative for the very way that it can empower the teacher. Storytelling is a pedagogical tool and telling my stories has furthered my professional development as an educator.

Stories are a learning tool, offering a way to achieve a higher level of understanding through reflection. When you write a story down, the story becomes true in a certain sense. The legitimization of a story is in seeing it written down and in reflecting on it. The telling of story fits with the multifaceted art of teaching. It is a unique way to integrate past with present and to stimulate change in pedagogical approaches. Aoki (2000) calls the use of storytelling “authentic teaching.” He sees teaching as a mindful watchfulness. Using the story of teaching at Education Plus had helped me explore my teaching as a behaviour and, as I rewrite the story, I am pursuing the truth of what I do as an Outreach educator.

Qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena (Boje, 2000). By focussing on key events, I have captured some of the essential processes of working at Education Plus. In lecturing on the culture of education, Boje argues for the importance of narrative,

contending that it should be used as an instrument of meaning-making. I agree that narrative is an embodiment of culture, which provides a way to understand the present and the past in a unique, humanistic way. Robinson and Hawpe (1986) also support the notion of story as a means of interpreting events, stating that narrative thinking resembles comprehension and problem solving. Story is at the centre of the process of discovery.

Although certain kinds of quantitative research might have been difficult to conduct due to the transient nature of the students at Education Plus, using stories also had its limitations. The stories were personal. They took place over an extended period of time and were clearly subject to my own interpretation. I was afraid of being judged for how the stories reflected on me as a person and as a teacher. However, I saw the changes in the students and I felt the changes in me. I knew I had something I wanted to tell. Many critics of narrative work see it as a simple therapy tool, which bears no value in research (Conle, 2000). I disagree. Narrative inquiry is a process that aids growth by combining intellect and emotion to foster the development of theoretical constructs of teaching.

The issues of current and relevant Outreach education information have been a source of discussion at the Outreach Educators' Conference as well as at the Outreach Educators' Network steering committee meetings with Alberta Learning. In looking at Johnson's (1989) theory on embodied knowledge, I realized that my experience and understanding of teaching in an Outreach school holds implications for my own growth in self-knowledge and for others who read this project. Objectivity was vital to this report. The stories I have told are not there to provide the background for an autobiography in which I am the hero (Smith, 1997). My story has not been glorified;

what appears on these pages is real. I discussed my stories with my colleagues to clarify certain facts. I rewrote to screen out *myth* as much as I could. I told my story as I saw it and I feel confident that my reflections show a deeper understanding of where good teaching comes from. Self-knowledge is a key facet of understanding because it demands that self-conscious questioning of assumed understandings. Through writing and reflecting I advanced my own understanding of teaching at-risk youth at Education Plus and, in the process, informed others who want to know what it means to be an educator at an Outreach school in rural Alberta.

Education Plus: An Overview

The Beginning

The initial discussions about an Outreach school in High River were based on the Foothills School Division's program options outlined in their Full Spectrum Learning discussion paper (1997). The Division wanted to increase school completion rates, meet increasing alternative learning demands in the district, help students who needed learning alternatives for significant personal or educational reasons, and have a facility to serve as a home-schooling base. The school was to have an open concept with space shared between students and staff. In June, 1997 six other staff members and myself from Foothills School Division went to two Outreach schools in Alberta to find out how they ran their programs. The High River alternative school was to provide programs for alternative and independent learners, so we had to find out how other Outreach schools were operating. The excitement at the Outreach schools we visited fueled our own anticipation of what was to happen over the coming school year.

Alberta Learning requires local school boards to develop policies to address the eligibility requirements for Outreach programs. In the Education Policies Manual, policy H-236 states that the Foothills School Division is committed to providing educational opportunities for students at-risk and those who have dropped out. The Division defines "dropout" as a student of high school age who has ceased to attend a traditional school. "At-risk" refers to high school students in danger of dropping out. Outreach students are funded students who are unable to attend a regular high school yet wish to continue with their high school education.

What's in a Name?

I remember sitting in my living room in Rocky Mountain House waiting for the conference call to discuss the name of the new Outreach school. I had a list of several names, including Education Plus. So did the advisory committee, which consisted of the principal and vice-principals of the local high schools, the secretary, and another teacher. We discussed what the school was going to be about, and we went through what we had garnered from the other Outreach schools we had visited. Education Plus was chosen because the Division envisioned a facility that would house a school and other agencies for Foothills youth. Our mandate was to serve as an alternative school to address the students who were falling through the cracks of the traditional system by offering individualized programming, flexible curriculum delivery, and access to community services. The vision of offering the *Plus* at Education Plus is an underlying philosophy that lingers with me and influences all my program decision making.

Start Up

My colleagues and I used the information we had gathered at the initial meetings, combined it with our excitement at offering a new alternative to a traditional school setting, and began Education Plus. By July we were ordering materials and on August 25th, 1997 Education Plus opened its doors in High River, Alberta. We combined admission packages from Career High in Innisfail and the Red Deer Outreach School. We read over other Outreach schools' philosophies and handbooks to try to decide how to operate the school. In just a few months we had to make adjustments to suit our own unique school population.

The Facility

Education Plus is located in a strip mall. There are no classrooms but there is one room for listening to music while working and another quiet room for studying and writing tests. Students are encouraged to bring their children with them and there is a playpen for babies. The couch is often used for a reading area. Tables are grouped together. By design the school is multi-aged, with several grades in one room, which promotes collaborative learning and growth. Teachers sit in the open area so they can interact with the students. The school's hours of operation are based on student and staffing needs.

Staffing

When the school division was hiring teachers for the new Outreach school, they were looking for two entrepreneurial, technologically-oriented teachers to be hired on 200 flex-day contracts. The principal was shared with the local high school. Two teachers were needed to handle the teaching and administration work that is required when dealing with Outreach schools and a principal who is off-site. When Education Plus expanded into Black Diamond and half-time into Okotoks, a third teacher was hired part-time. A year later, Okotoks became full time and staffing became fragmented. Currently there is one teacher in each location and staffing is provided on a cost-recovery basis.

Registration

To register at Education Plus, students must book an appointment. I do an intake and orientation meeting with them to discern whether the school is suited for them. I go over the rules, the instructional materials that are used, and what they need to graduate according to their transcripts. I have them fill out their graduation plan and I encourage

career counselling if they are not sure what they want to do when they are finished high school. Students are then expected to set out their yearly goals, and plan the first course they are going to take. The students provide me with the dates they are handing in their work. We then set up a mid-review meeting to see how the course is progressing and whether their goal sheets have to be re-examined (see Appendix C for sample orientation package). Students are engaged in setting goals and making choices when they first come into the facility, which sets the groundwork for self-directed learning (Housego, 1999.)

Education Plus Students

Outreach students are described as youth who are at-risk of not completing their education and who are not able to fit into the traditional patterns of high school. The Outreach students that I have worked with range in ability from very low to very gifted. They are between the ages of 15 and 19 and their backgrounds and personal issues vary greatly. They include teenage moms, street youth, drug dependent adolescents, professional athletes, and those who must work to support themselves. Some have been expelled or requested to leave the local high school. Many of the Outreach students appear to have been conditioned to expect someone in authority to tell them what to do. As well, they seem to expect expressions of disappointment and anger when they don't comply with expectations. Perhaps Education Plus works better for them because it is a storefront school with an open, friendly, and nonjudgmental atmosphere.

Housego (1999) categorized Outreach students as the wounded, the workers and the wise (p. 92.) "Wounded" students are those who have negative views of themselves, of school and of teachers. Often, they have had minimal success. "Workers" are students who work full-time or part-time while attending school. "Wise" students choose Outreach

education in order to advance their program or escape from social situations. All Outreach locations tend to share the same kinds of students.

I believe one reason that Education Plus is a successful alternative to the traditional high school is because the school is student-centered. More and more students are turning to Education Plus as a viable choice for their education. Students who come to Education Plus are not faced with the proverbial authoritative, judgment-ridden approach that can be seen in some traditional public schools. Moreover, once students have learned how to receive their education through an Outreach format, a metamorphosis often takes place.

Nelson's story. Nelson's first year with us was not a success. He came in with lots of promises to himself and his parents that he was going to finish his grade ten and eleven courses in just one year. He eagerly sat down with me and set up his timeline and goal sheet. He had it all planned out. One module every two days, including the weekends, would get him where he wanted to be. I saw the determination in his eyes and I let him try. He only completed two courses that year, failing one.

Nelson's second year was different. When he came in to register he could not believe that he was so far behind his friends who attended the traditional high school. He said he thought that coming to Education Plus would be easy since he did not have to attend classes. What he found was that it was harder because he had to get himself motivated and actually do the work. Once again he said he was going to graduate with his friends and make up to lost time. We went over what he had planned and what his commitment was going to have to be. He stuck to it, finishing his coursework ahead of his peers. I think he floated out of the school on graduation day.

Learning Materials

Education Plus uses distance learning materials for student coursework. Using the modular format means that I can work one-on-one with students in a tutorial capacity. Since I am not a generalist and I am constantly meeting with or working with students, students must work independently and come to me when they need help. I have found that some end up working collaboratively and some become more creative at finding solutions to their problems.

The use of distance learning material will lead some to believe that Education Plus is not involved in self-directed learning. Della-Dora (1979) would see the delivery format and tracking of students as providing individualized instruction but there is no universal definition of the term (Chovanec, 1998.) Self-directedness is central to the Outreach philosophy (Housego, 1999) but may not be implemented at the curriculum level.

Changes and Challenges

The very structure of an Outreach school creates its own challenges. Unlike classroom teaching where you prepare for what you are going to deliver, you cannot prepare completely for the day at Education Plus. Students are given individualized instruction based on personal goals; their program is designed for their education needs and future goals. Each student who comes into Education Plus requires different approaches and I have been able enhance my ability to coordinate the operations at Education Plus by stepping back frequently and evaluating situations as they arise.

In response to changes in our student population, the daily running of Education Plus has been adjusted over the past four years. As student needs have changed, the

school has adapted by changing the hours, administrative policies, and various types of motivation techniques. At first, we were open until 8 one night a week. We found that most students would not come after six. Those students who were working full time were doing jobs that were physical in nature. They did not have the energy to come in for help with their schoolwork after a day of work.

In our first year, students who did not meet our expectations were put on a leave of absence until they were ready to recommit. Some students never came back. Now they meet their own expectations, without me having to judge them. I keep track of their programs and their work ethic but I let them come to their own conclusions about staying with it or leaving. Although they may not be completing as many courses as I would like them to, they are taking control of their own education. I am seeing more students return of their own volition, more independent and determined than before.

Katie's story. Katie started her English course in September. Whenever she would start to miss meeting her goals, I would give her a call. She would never pick up the phone but I would see her a couple of days later. At one stage I had been trying to get hold of her for a few months as I had other students wanting to take the course and I was short on materials. I wanted to ask her if she was finishing. She finally came in to talk to me. I told her that she had to finish soon because I needed the material for other students. She said she was afraid to come in. I asked her if she was afraid of facing me or afraid of facing her own guilt. She said she felt ashamed for not getting her course done. We then sat down and talked.

Katie's mom had been injured and she was forced to go to work to support her family. At seventeen she had to become the breadwinner. She said she would love to just

be doing schoolwork but she did not have that luxury. Feeling angry at myself for prejudging her lack of completion, I asked her to please keep me informed about what was going on and to hand what she could when she could. Her face relaxed and relief set in.

Tracking

In administration, we figured out over time what was important to keep track of. Having a bunch of numbers is a waste of energy if they do not have a direct purpose. In addition to student numbers we had to be aware of the amount of student work coming in for marking. The changing roles for teaching at Education Plus meant that we need to keep a variety of records to show what was truly happening. We did not fit the traditional school parameters. An example of this is when Division Office would request our student numbers at the beginning of September. They would begin to get nervous when there were only eight students registered at our school on the first day. It took some time before they realized that our students are registered in a continuous enrollment, with no term timelines, which means our numbers grow daily.

Motivation Techniques

As for motivation, we tried various external factors but they were short lived. Prizes were given out for completing modules. We did up a school list showing who was where in their studies, and we tried placing our own demands on the student. The motivation only lasted while the prizes did. I decided to ask the students what motivated them and the majority indicated that their relationship with me, and letting them be responsible for their education resulted in more intrinsic motivation. Students need to have a reason for going to school. I see Education Plus as a safe place where students can

be themselves, without judgement, and they can trust those who are trying to help them. School needs to lead somewhere that is meaningful for the student. The focus should be on furthering students' life education and not just on helping them find a job after graduation (Gatto, 1992). In order to motivate students, schools must be careful not to think that they only provide one element in a student's education, that is, the curriculum.

Student Population

The school structure is based on a student population that fluctuates throughout the year. In the first year, the majority of Education Plus students were on court-order to be in school. They swapped jail stories and drug adventures. School was not their concern, but they revelled in having a voice, and a place to belong.

Pat's story. On Pat's first day with us, the transportation department called to say that he was no longer allowed to ride the bus because he was threatening students. He showed up with a newly shaved head and an attitude. Pat had just gotten out of jail and was on court order to go to school or get a job. His mom was making him choose school. He did not want to come but he told me that it was better than having to get a job. Pat's mom pulled me aside and told me that it was not his fault that he stole a car, nor was it his fault that some little "punk" was frightened of him. I knew I would not be getting much help with Pat's behaviour from his mom. The following school days were spent with Pat trying to do as little as possible while creating as much disturbance as possible. Since I was still used to a classroom situation, I thought that we had to tolerate Pat's behaviour. My time and energy went into policing behaviour. Pat did end up back in jail but not without teaching me to think about the boundaries of acceptable student behaviour in the school.

Today, students who behave like Pat are asked to leave for that day and to come back when they are ready to work. The schoolwork is flexible and mobile so students can work elsewhere, and the facility is too small to serve as a locker room or a place to hang out. Most students respect that. When they sense that they are not in the mood to work, they will tell me and leave the school. They might come back later in the day, or the next day.

Connie's story. Connie had just been returned home after running away with a drug dealer. He had tried to kill her and she fled to the police. Her social worker brought her in to register for school. She came to school every day, taking many smoke breaks and long lunches but when she was in the school she worked diligently. I made her aware of how much time she spent on break and she was okay with it since she got her work done. Connie excelled in her high academic courses and was particularly thrilled the time she had to teach me a concept from her science text. Like Pat, Connie provided the groundwork for the changes I had to make as I adjusted to teaching in an Outreach school.

Mark's story. Mark's pattern was to come to school for a few hours a day and then head out to hang out. I received a phone call from the principal from the local high school telling me that Mark was hanging around the school. When the principal confronted him about being in the school, Mark began yelling obscenities. Mark used to attend the high school until the same principal expelled him. The two had a history of not liking each other. The principal called me and told me that I was accountable for Mark's whereabouts and that I was to tell him he that if he came to the school again, the police would be called.

When Mark came into Education Plus the next day, I told him about the phone call and I asked him why he went up there. He said he was just visiting. He admitted to getting rude but only after the principal was rude to him. I explained that I got into trouble and the image of the school was being questioned because of his actions. He gave me a puzzled look and stated that when he is in Education Plus, he is accountable to me, but when he leaves, he is accountable to himself. He was upset that the principal called me and asked to use my phone. I was worried about what he was going to do and say. He said that I should not worry. I decided to trust him.

Mark called the principal of the local high school and apologized for his behaviour. He said that he was wrong to be there and to say what he did to him. Mark also explained that when he leaves Education Plus that he alone is responsible for his actions, not the school, and that I should not have been called. I was in awe of this student who came to us as someone who was very needy; he was always seeking attention and approval from outside sources. In the past he would not have apologized or seen himself as responsible. Mark used to blame everyone else for the predicaments he would get himself into. Now he was stronger, shouldering the blame and unafraid to confront an authoritative figure. He saw himself as responsible for his own education and for his actions.

Student Change

In the beginning, the tables were filled with students who thought that Outreach schools were an easy way out of doing class work. Many soon learned that independent study is a lot harder. Then the population shifted more to those students who were strong

academically but not happy with a traditional setting. These students were ready to take control of their education and take responsibility for their successes and failures.

Robert's story. Robert came to Education Plus from another Division. He had been handling his own education since junior high and he wanted to try our school. He was already a year ahead of where he should be. Our principal encouraged him to enroll in the local high school but Robert refused. He said that he did not want to be confined by classrooms and spend six hours a day in school. Instead, he wanted to focus on his career in Paramedics and going to Education Plus would allow him the freedom to volunteer with the local fire department, do his ride-along training with paramedics in Calgary, and achieve his diploma at the same time. Robert is now finishing his college training and has been offered a job in Edmonton.

Education Plus also started working with professional sport players, students going for pilot licenses, and those who were travelling the world. Students could come and go throughout the year and that added to the developing school culture. Today, the school has a whole new atmosphere. The place is energized by the complexities of daily student activities. Some students stay all day, while others do a couple of hours each day, or drop by when they need help or to write a test. Each day is different because the student dynamic changes daily.

Shifting to Outreach Teaching

In the first year at Education Plus I required each full time student to finish three modules in two weeks, utilizing distance learning materials, in order for them to be accepted as a *permanent* student. Later, I could see that by focussing so intently on completing academics within a structured time frame, I was creating a parallel to a traditional school setting and I lost many students to the pressure and the criteria. I became indirectly responsible for their failure. In the school's second year I decided to let the students choose which goals they wanted to achieve while I encouraged them to do more if they could. Although the students generated more course completions, I felt they were still not reaching their full potential in that area.

I was still measuring student success in academics. However, when I looked at how far they had come in their own personal growth, I had to applaud them. I had to learn how to redefine success. What I found interesting was that those students who left earlier in the year and then made the decision to come back, were more in control of their learning and their lives. Letting students set their own goals made them more intrinsically accountable and they became responsible for their successes and failures.

Josh's Story

Expelled from all of the schools in the Division, Josh knew that Education Plus was his last choice. He was honest in saying that he did not know if he could last at the school. Josh believed that he was incapable of controlling himself and his outbursts of behaviour. One minute he would be writing and the next minute he would be playing drums or falling on the ground in a pretend seizure. Josh was asked to leave for the day

many times that year but he did not get expelled. However, he did not complete a course with us that year, either.

In his second year Josh changed. His behaviour was the same but less frequent. I knew that I had to ignore the behaviour to get to the person behind it. We made a connection and Josh began to tell me some of his story. He had leukemia when he was young, and he was abandoned by his mother. At the end of that school year Josh won the award for completing the most courses and, since then, has been one of our strongest advocates for school pride. We both cried at his graduation.

Redefining Success

For Outreach students, I had to redefine my own standards of success. Now I see success in a phone call when a student cannot come in when she said she would. I see success when a student deals with his anger by going for a walk instead of punching the wall, passing with a 67 per cent, getting a job and holding onto it, or heading to university. My goal is to make students responsible for their own education. I let them set their own direction. I let them know how to get to where they plan to go and what consequences they will be facing. The students' education is their responsibility.

There are no classrooms and attendance is not mandatory at Education Plus. I have learned to look more at a student's work ethic, and at what success is for that particular student, rather than at other kinds of rules and structures. In the first year of operation I tried the traditional dictatorship of stating the amount of work students had to complete to accomplish their goals. I wanted them to be accountable. Some left. Some got lost under the pressure. Some excelled beyond what I had hoped. In the second year of operation, I let the students decide the amount of work they want to get done. Again, I

lost some students, but not as many. Some of those who did not come back were not really interested in being in school at that time and they felt too guilty to admit it. Unfortunately, they were letting guilt guide them. I found that the line is very thin between pushing too hard and not enough. Outreach educators have to understand that individualized educational programs are at the mercy of students' past school experiences and that it takes time to get students to be more accountable to themselves.

Those students who came back for their second year really seemed to have their education and lives back on track. They quickly warned others that doing school at Education Plus was hard work but worth it. Of course, there were many times when it felt as if Education Plus was a dumping ground for the students that the other high schools did not want to deal with. So, in order to prove that we were viable within the Division, I registered all students who came through the school's doors. Even though being at Education Plus might not have been in the best interest of the student academically or socially, the students still became responsible for their own education. I think many of Education Plus's successes have come because of this policy.

I have learned that it is not always necessary to get caught up in the issues. Instead, I have discovered that I often need to take time away from an issue. Just as I would connect with a rock on a walk, I would feel something tugging at me. Action and non-action can be considered spending creative time wisely if I spend my time being myself and getting to know the truth that is in me (Trott 1997). I have learned that by taking time to uncover what the *true* issue is, I can deal with it more effectively, in a less reactionary way.

When students first come to see me I ask them about their goals, and why they want to come to Education Plus. Often students will say that they need to get their grade twelve. Through the orientation session I try to find out why they want their grade twelve. If students cannot tell me why they want to get their education, then I know there will be a motivation problem. Knowing why is central to doing well because school then has purpose. For some students their goal can be a particular number of courses they want to complete, to graduate early, or to be in school so they do not get kicked out of the house. As the school year progresses we go through their goals together and we make changes as their lives change. The school fits them so they can work at their own pace. Even though students set their own goals I still have students apologize to me for not completing their goals. I tell them they should be apologizing to themselves, as they are the ones who have to live with the consequences of their actions. When students take responsibility for their education they become more capable of being masters of their own destiny.

Recognizing Limitations

The vision statement at Education Plus states we are a student-centered school that encourages academic growth of the individual through independent learning. It has been hard work to provide a flexible, non-traditional student-based program that encourages independence and responsibility for self-directed learning. Individualized programming requires a lot of extra time and energy. One Outreach student can be similar to two or three *regular* students. Last year 70 out of the 205 students at Education Plus were categorized as Outreach and I was the only teacher on staff until a .4 position

was hired in March. I felt guilty for being exhausted. Now that I have reflected more carefully about my year, I understand why I was ready to quit in February.

In the 2000/2001 school year I found myself in a predicament. Our school had become a victim of its own success. We had too many students and not enough staff. One day, a student came in to drop something off and I didn't know who he was. Students were coming and going and it was a struggle to keep up. The marking was piling up; three full days worth of marking were coming in per day. The student count was about 200. Outreach students were disappearing and there was no time to track them. I felt guilty at not being able to give students the time and help they needed with their courses. I had hoped that the .4 staff position hired to handle all of the math and science courses would help ease my stress level. However, the workload did not ease up. Instead we added another service, which increased our student population.

The local high school had not been sending math and science students to Education Plus as they knew they were not my preferred subject areas. However, some Outreach kids, some diploma students looking for courses to get into university, and some adult students that I was teaching were taking high end math and science courses. I had a colleague come from his school to help with my students. That, too, added to the administrative workload and was proving not to be practical for him to travel to High River and then go back to deal with his own workload.

Speaking from my own experience I was pushed too far in terms of what was expected of me by the Division, the principal and from myself. Promising a student-centered and individualized program to all the students resulted in me taking on more than I could do. Being the only teacher on site meant that I had to handle most of the

administrative, counselling, and teaching work that is usually shared among a variety of staff members at most schools. The optimum size for an Outreach school was supposed to be a two to three teacher facility with thirty to forty students per teacher (Housego, 1999). I needed help but fiscal restraints meant having to fight for that help. By the time the “point four” position was in place I was already close to non-functional. Caught up in wanting to provide students with what the school was meant to be, I was losing sight of who I was.

In order to survive the year, I had to learn to say no more students, and no more trying to figure out what to do without the staff around to help. The influx of students was caused by many factors. Staff shortages at the local high school meant time-table conflicts, so students tried to pick up classes with us. Oversized classrooms meant teachers were more willing to encourage some students to drop out of their class and head to Education Plus. The higher numbers of “blended” students meant that I was increasingly unable to keep track of Outreach students.

Julian’s story. Julian called to find out why I have not been calling him. He thought that he was no longer a student at Education Plus. He felt that, because I had not been phoning him to check up on his progress, I was either mad at him or that he was no longer welcome. He indicated that he depended on my phone calls since his job did not allow him to come into the school on a regular basis. I apologized to him and explained the situation at the school; there were too many students and not enough staff to handle them all. He was encouraged to call me when he could and I would do the same. We also set up an appointment for a face to face meeting, hoping that he would still feel welcome at the school. Julian is a student who has been rejected by his parents and who left the

local high school because he had to work to survive. Although he was doing adult things to pay his bills, he was still a teenager who needed reassuring that he did belong.

Unfortunately, Julian did not return to school for the rest of the year.

The Power of Choice

I was full. My days at school were becoming whirlwinds and I voiced my frustration in an email to myself.

Note to self: Today was emotionally hard - how do you limit the number of students you take in? Effects: integrity of school, my own health VS the needs of students. They have come to depend on us but the quality is going down due to lack of staffing. How do you decide where to cut off? What's reasonable? Why do I feel so guilty? Why do I feel so sad?

How could I go against what I believe, which is to give students back their power of choice? Giving students their choice does not mean that apathy impairs my judgement towards their education. On the contrary, I see myself as a provider, an educator who shows students the consequences for their choices but allows them to choose. Denying students the right to choose where to go to school is against what I have learned about working with youth. Choice is a sign of power, of control and giving educational control to high school students is motivational.

In order to create an atmosphere that allows Outreach students to come to school, I believe you have to generate a working relationship based on trust. That requires time, and I spent most of it counselling students. I got to see some students once a day, others once a week, once a month, or once a year. I felt as if I was losing control. The school had to stop taking in students. The numbers were too high and the workload too much. My body was starting to shut down due to exhaustion. I called the principal to discuss what was happening and he agreed to stop taking in students except for Outreach. We set

some new boundaries, giving priority to graduating students from the local high school. The hardest part was getting through my emotions. I was sad, hurt, angry, frustrated, and guilt-ridden and I did not know why. Suddenly I realized the cause of my angst. I was going against my very beliefs. The students' power of choice was being taken away from them.

I was angry because, like the students, I did not have a choice. The choice was made for us by politics and by money. Education Plus was not supported financially. I was always given opportunities to learn about Outreach education with the full support of the administration of the Foothills School Division. They have honoured what I had to say and treated me as a professional in the Outreach field. No one could have visualized what Education Plus was to become in four years. By providing services to students from all over the spectrum - at-risk youth, professional sport players, full time workers, parents, upgrading students, and adults - the school has become a viable choice for all high school students in the community. Education Plus has proved to be successful in helping many different students find their way but the money did not always follow the students and funding for the alternative setting was a matter of constant concern as it continued to grow.

Monica's story. Monica has shown up for school every year for the past four years wanting to do her grade ten. I have often asked her why she wants to do it. Her reply is simply "Because it's got to get done." She has yet to complete a course. One day she came in asking if she could type up her resume. I told her I was glad to see her and of course she could type up her resume. There would be a small printing fee if she had any money. In case she had not eaten today, she was told to help herself to some fruit if she

was hungry. We chatted a bit about the jobs she was applying for and how things were at home. Then I said good bye with a smile and an invitation to her to come back to school when she was ready.

In the past Monica would have driven me to great frustration. I would have tried everything to keep her in school and to get her to get some credits. In fact, in the school's first year I did place her on a leave of absence, threatening never to take her back unless she changed her attitude. Her attitude didn't change but mine did. I was fortunate enough to attend a solution-focussed workshop at a conference where I learned that some students are at school to visit while others are full participants. Both are okay. I can now see that I cannot put my energy into those who are unwilling, for whatever reason, to be actively involved in their education. When they are ready, I will be here to welcome them and if they never choose to get their education, they are the ones who have to live with that choice.

Eric's story. Eric came in the other day to drop off his physics text and modules. He was moving back with his mom. He said his step-dad was a jerk, treating him like a child. Eric had been on his own since he was sixteen. He did live with his mom but he had to tend to her and her mental illness. He raised his sister. We talked about how parents treat us the same way they were treated. I then asked him what he wanted to do. He said college. We discussed various courses of action. He said he hated making decisions. I sympathized, saying that the decision is the hard part. We went over the things he said he should do. He wrote down that he will volunteer in his field to see if it is what he wants to do and, if so, which specialty. He agreed that he should go see a counsellor at the college to find out about getting his diploma versus entering as a mature

student, and go to the local Outreach school in the town to which he was moving to so that he could finish off the school year. He was now prepared to make a better decision.

I do not tell my students what to do. My questions allow them to choose what they want to get accomplished, where they want to be, and how they want to get there. Students need to be able to make their own decisions and be able to deal with the consequences. I help them with the knowledge they need in order to make their own decisions. Teens thrive on relationships. Most are looking for a place to belong. It can be difficult for them to find acceptance. I find it ironic that teens, in trying to figure out who they are, focus on external relationships rather than within themselves.

When you have a school that successfully deals with troubled students, the school and the student can quickly become forgotten entities. The problem students go away, but the workload in the successful Outreach school becomes even greater. The infrequency of discipline problems is correlated to the students' ability to make their own decisions and with the teacher being non-judgmental when students are assertive about their education (Housego, 1999.) Time is needed to build relationships and to break through the barriers that students have in place. Teaching is a heartfelt profession. As I confronted the limits of my own ability to do more, I could see what the students needed but I could not do the job that should be done simply because of a lack of staff. The true potential of Outreach education at Education Plus and other schools was being undermined by understaffing and under-funding.

Becoming Responsible

At Education Plus, I have learned to allow students to set their own timetable because their work ethic is derived from the goals they set out. When goals are not being

reached I meet with students to discuss what is hindering them and help them to find ways to achieve success. I try to get them to tell me what is going on and to provide their own solutions. My role is to make them aware of the consequences of their actions so that they can make an informed decision. At times I want to fall back into my old way of telling students what to do. However, forcing at-risk students to meet an outsider's standards has often resulted in anger and frustration for my students and me. Getting frustrated because students were not doing what they needed to do to meet my expectations would only result in the students getting angry for not having control over their education. Encouraging students to accept the responsibility, allowed me to let go of trying to control what the students did. Accepting students for who they are and where they are at in their lives is a freeing experience.

Many new Education Plus students tend to misuse their freedom: they do not come to school and they do not do any work at home. When I observe these things happening, I contact the students to see how they are doing but I do not push for completion unless they ask me to. Sometimes they try to blame the school or me for not completing assignments, but I keep putting the onus back on to them. I have found that if you let most kids fall, they will pick themselves up later on. Sometimes it takes a few months, other times a few years. For some students there is a stronger, positive change in the second year, once they have internalized that their educational success is up to them. However, regardless of when the change occurs, Education Plus students have to be ready to take most of the credit and the blame for their academic progress.

Trevor's story. I remember Trevor, a student who managed to complete a few courses in his first year at Education Plus. When he returned for his second year he was

not accomplishing anything. He would show up for about fifteen minutes a day, ask a couple of questions, take a long smoke break and then leave. I was getting frustrated and I demanded that he had to complete a certain amount of work or be placed on a leave of absence. He did not meet the goal I laid out and I told him to go and get a job. I felt bad for reacting out of my own frustration and I realized that I took away Trevor's ownership of his education. I gave him a way to blame me for not completing his course. Once I understood that it was Trevor's choice to do as little or as much as he wanted, I felt relief and I hoped that he would come back.

A few months later Trevor came into the school looking to use the computer for a resume. I recognized the effort it took for him to walk through the door. I offered him some help in typing up a resume and I told him that he was welcome to come back to school to finish his English course when he chose to do so. He said he'd think about it. Finally, around May, Trevor came back in and finished his course and we celebrated. It took him all year to do one grade ten subject. In a traditional school Trevor would not have been allowed back in. Once I recognized that he was the one who had to live with his own choices and that I had no control over what he did, I was able to welcome him whenever he came into the school. Most of the responsibility for his learning was his. I think Trevor's story is at the heart of what I am trying to do at Education Plus.

Building Relationships

One of the critical elements behind the success at Education Plus is the amount of time I spend on building relationships. Many Outreach students haven't had many opportunities to share their lives with someone whom they feel really cares. A great deal of my time is spent counseling students because I believe that relationship is key to

motivation. In allowing youth culture and personal problems to take priority over curriculum, I seek to acknowledge the worth of every individual student. Housego (1999) sees the Outreach approach as informal, nonhierarchical, and collaborative. Outreach schools are caring and encouraging environments, equipping students with the ability to survive and learn in today's society (Benson, 1990).

There are many ways that I build relationship. I feel it is most important that I not judge. I treat all students as individuals, and I believe their circumstances will dictate what I expect from them and what they expect from themselves. I try to focus on total personality development and, if a topic arises, we discuss it openly. Since there are no classrooms, whoever is in the building usually participates in the conversation. I recognize that for some students, just walking through the door can be a great accomplishment. I try to talk to those students about what made them come in. Some may come in just to type up a resume, others just to chat or have a cup of coffee. I try to make them feel welcome in the hopes that they may decide to do more with their education.

When dealing with Outreach students, I find the greatest difficulties in keeping them motivated and in school. When I have tried prizes and awards for the most work done, some students have gone out of their way to do school work while others simply did not care. I have found that extrinsic motivation may have worked for only a short period of time. Extrinsic motivation is more successful when intrinsic motivators are already in place.

Without the desire to be in school Outreach students will not complete too many courses, or they will leave. Their patterns in a traditional school have been to disappear or behave in a way to get expelled. One of the ways I use to move them beyond these

patterns is to simply get to know my students better. Students turn out in full force when we are having a pancake breakfast, or a potluck supper. We also put their names up on the wall once they complete a course; they sure look forward to the drum roll when their name goes up. School has to be meaningful for all individuals and I don't believe that academics or the promise of a job are sufficient motivation for many Outreach students. When a young man is worried about a place to live, he does not really care if he has completed all of the work in his math module. When a young woman does not have anyone to talk to, she may take her frustrations out on herself, often through violent choices. When no one seems to care, young people may be more encouraged to drug away the pain. Even as I say that motivation must come from within the Outreach student, I recognize that, at times, it is buried very deep.

Hargreaves and Fullan (1998) recognize that an educational reform strategy that improves on relationships has a chance of succeeding. Good relationships are emotionally fulfilling and tend to lead to higher productivity, improved problem-solving and better learning. de Gues (1997) observes that although a path brought you to where you are, you created the path yourself. Therefore, it is the walking that beats the path and not the path that makes the walk. In looking at the planning and strategy for creating change, de Gues stresses what Education Plus does, the constant beating of a new path of learning.

Judgement

Just as I suspend judgement when reflecting on my teaching, I believe that I should also suspend judgement when I deal with my students. That is not to say that I accept their excuses. I merely note the reasons and point out the pattern that they have put

themselves into. When I judge I am being negative and I tend to be more reactive. In my experience, that translates into losing students.

Tasha's story. I emailed myself a note about Tasha, a student who has a multitude of excuses for not getting her schoolwork done. I sense that she is hiding from herself. Like many of my Outreach students, Tasha would show up to update me on the reasons why she could not hand in her assignments. I would smile and write them down in her file and encourage her to not let life get in the way of her school. In March she showed up with renewed determination to do her schoolwork. She asked me if she could still graduate this year. I looked at her file and all of the courses she still had to do with only 16 weeks of school left. I said it did not look good. I saw the look of defeat on her face and I realized that it was not up to me to say whether she could graduate or not. That decision was up to her.

To try to ease her hurt, I told Tasha that graduating next year was okay but if she really wanted to do it this year, then it would mean finishing up the courses she had been working on since September within 2 days. We then pulled out a calendar and plotted when courses would have to be completed. She would then have to hand in her work twice a week with no exceptions until the end of the school year so she could graduate. She smiled at the thought of still being able to graduate. I asked her if she thought she could stick to the schedule. She agreed. I photocopied the calendar for her and she wrote what work was due on the days that she was to hand her work in. Tasha started to berate herself for not doing anything sooner. She acknowledged she should have been working on it from the start and this was the consequence of her actions. I asked her to consider the first half of the year a holiday and the second half as time to get to work.

One of my roles as a teacher is to provide opportunities for students. I could have judged Tasha on her lack of commitment and withdrawn her from the school. Her actions were leading towards us saying good bye for awhile, until she got serious about school, but I did not threaten her with that action. Although Tasha did not manage to graduate that year, she did finish six courses. Her motivation to succeed soared and she returned in the fall to finish. Tasha graduated early and entered a local college the following spring.

If I judge students, then I am the one being negative, not the student. Judging a student is assuming who they are and where they should be. Working from a negative mindset does not allow me to see clearly or understand completely where students are in terms of their personal lives or school career. Being judged can be paralyzing. Students come to expect teachers to see them in a certain way and then they behave as expected. That can damage aspirations for change. Students need to be allowed the freedom to obtain their education without judgement and the fear of being judged. Judgement should be replaced with acceptance of where students are in their academic careers, be they stopping by to do a resume, only doing one course all year, or taking on as many courses as they can so they can graduate early. In Outreach education I am able to provide a school program that is flexible. I believe there has been greater success where students have been allowed to progress at their own pace, without judgement.

Consequences

I tend to ask the students up front what they need. If they need a lot of structure to accomplish their goals, together we look at how that can be provided to them. As an educational guide, I help the students set their own goals and let them know the

consequences of their choices. Many students have a hard time understanding notions of choice and consequences.

Ted's story. Ted came in to enroll in a Math 20 course. After explaining school procedures I asked him when he wanted to finish the course. He asked me to tell him when I wanted him to finish. I told him it was not up to me; it was his choice. He was stuck. The look on his face when he had to make his own decision said it all; he did not have a clue. He did not know how to respond to having a choice in his education. I asked him what he thought he could handle for a workload. He said that since he was not working full time yet he wanted to put in half a day of school each day. I asked him to look through the first math module to see how long it would take him to finish it. He said, "A couple of days." I then plotted out what that would mean in terms of finishing the course and asked him if that was okay. He said it was not because he wanted to finish the course sooner in case he had to start to work full time. So, he set out a goal to complete the course before he was to start working full time.

When students make their own choices, they take ownership for their education. They are then able to take pride in their accomplishments and accept responsibility for what did not get done. Since I have not set the goal, I do not get blamed or used as an excuse if the student is not successful. However, I do help them understand the consequences of their choices. I guide them with questions such as "When do you want to hand your modules in?" "If you hand them in at that pace then you will have time to finish two more courses this year. Are you okay with that?" I can see when students stop and think about what they want. I also see their struggle if they don't really know what

they want. Some choices become too hard. They do not know what to choose so they do not choose at all (although, as I often tell them, choosing not to choose is still a choice).

Justin's story. With choice comes consequence. I don't want my students to get bogged down by the consequences. I try to help them see that if they make different choices, consequences can be changed. I hadn't seen Justin for three months. I called his home to see if he was still interested in coming to school. He showed up four days later to talk to me. He said he was scared to come in. I asked him why. He said it was because he had not been doing anything. I said that coming in was a good start and to look at what made him come in to see me. He said he knew he had to face responsibility for not getting his schoolwork done.

I asked him what he had been doing. He told me he had been kicked out of home and was staying at a buddy's place. He had to leave there and was looking for a place and was happy that he found a full time job that was to start next week. Finding a place to live was a higher priority than school. I made sure that he had a place secured and knew where he could go if he needed help, offering to make the appointments for him or introduce him beforehand if he wanted me to. We then talked about school. He said he still wanted to continue. Inside I knew that he would not be able to handle it all. He needed to spend time getting a home and some money. However, the decision was his.

Justin came in four months later. He said he could not believe how much time had gone by and he had not done much in his schoolwork. We talked about his priorities. He said that he was living back at home and did not have to work all the time. He wanted to find a job that fit into school instead of trying to fit school into a job. We discussed different strategies he could use to make school fit back into his life. He was a regular

student for three weeks and then missed his last two appointments. I hope he will be back sometime and we will try again.

Life is a consequence of choice. Each time students choose a path their life becomes the consequence of their actions. Some students keep choosing the same consequence. They end up facing the same dilemmas and creating the same brick walls. In my own life, I was able to extend beyond the walls because I believed in my abilities. Family and friends were my cheering section. I moved away from negative influences and I stopped choosing people who were bad for me. Not everyone has those same opportunities. Not everyone can see what it means to “lead a better life.”

We all need to know that we are worthwhile. I rejoice when students come into the school, rather than judging them for their lack of attendance or their incomplete schoolwork. Most know that they have to live with their own consequences. Students learn at their intake session that their work ethic is important and my expectations of them are to meet the goals that they set out. They have the choice to set their goals and they are the ones who have to live with their choices. I help them shape the responsibility of their own education.

Conclusion

Just as a story has a beginning so does the process of learning. I hope stories will promote further discussion about the implications of teaching in an Outreach school. I have tried to leave the interpretations to the reader to be internalized and discussed. What I see is different from what others will see. While the sharing of stories is an important step, the telling of the story is the beginning and should lead to discussion and reflection. As Conle (2000) points out, the narrator does not decide the outcome. She questions whether the writer is merely a recorder, but I agree with Connelly and Clandinin (1990) that narrative is product and process. The act of writing becomes the inquiry as I reflect on the narratives. In turn, they will serve as a point of inquiry for those who read my stories.

The Outreach Educator

An Outreach educator is an agent of change. Sarason (1971) states "...teachers are far from having a role in some important decisions that affect life in the classroom." (p. 154). I disagree. Curriculum that is to be covered is not optional, but there are many different ways in which it might be presented. That's where teachers' personality, creativity and true heart come into the school, in how they reach the students. Because I am in a position of knowledge and influence, I feel that I contribute greatly to the important decisions that affect our school. Housego (1999) describes Outreach teachers as being "mavericks." She lists several prerequisites for those who want to work in the outreach field; maturity in thought and acquisition of life experiences, ability to teach in several subject areas, caring, ability to critique pedagogy, and ability to be self-directed. There is a profound role change when teachers move from

working in traditional settings to working in Outreach schools (Davies, 1980; Housego, 1999.)

Another Change

Education Plus is moving. While visiting an Outreach school in Camrose I found that they had created a working partnership with several youth agencies. The notion of bringing youth and community services together fit the Education Plus mandate set in 1997. There had to be a way to create the same availability in High River. More research was done and representatives of various agencies were called to a general meeting to see if they thought the idea was valid. That was a year ago. Within that time education Plus has partnered with Literacy for Life and Foothills Youth Foundation to form the Foothills Youth Centre. We are scheduled to move into a new facility in spring 2002.

Sarason (1971) believes that the more things change, the more they remain the same (p. 2.) I agree, but within a particular context. The governing body of education takes years to generate change. By the time the change is ready for implementation, the school culture has moved on in response to new pressures and new opportunities. In one sense Alberta Learning is forever trying to catch up with change. Sarason goes on to say "the agents of change from outside the school are too frequently ignorant of the culture in which the change is to be embedded..." (p. 236.) However, Outreach staff tends to be proactive and are often in the forefront of educating beyond the school boundaries. As an example, representatives of Alberta Learning have been invited to the Outreach Educators' Network steering committee meetings since its inception. Now they seek our advice and input into policy changes and ask for recommendations and feedback on their own planned restructuring models.

I see my story as part of the culture of Education Plus. Who I am reflects directly to what I do at the school and I sense that there is a cyclical relationship between the two. One changes the other. Barth (1991) believes that the most important change to bring to the school is a culture of continuous adaptability, experimentation, and invention. He feels that such a culture is necessary because schools are generally cautious and conserving and because the world and the students are changing so fast and in such unpredictable ways. Hansen and Childs (1998) point out that education can be a limited experience unless the climate of the school enriches and enhances its culture so that teachers can teach better and students can learn more. I believe that using narrative inquiry for this project allowed me to focus on what Johnson (1989) sees as a way of understanding my world and which, I believe, allows me to generate change at Education Plus.

Where I Want to go

Change is inevitable at an Outreach school. The same can be said for an Outreach teacher. We see what needs to be done and find a way to do it. For me, I see the need to give students more success. The way to do it is to focus more on courses that hold meaning for them instead of the core subjects. English, social, science, and math are burdened subjects. If students come to school to get their diploma, then they will do the core subjects. However, if Outreach students come to school to find meaning for education, then they should be taking courses that will build their confidence.

Since there has been a .4 teacher to offer math and science at Education Plus, there is a noticeable difference between how students approach us. Because the teacher is part-time she is able to come in and concentrate more on the subject matter. Students

come in for tutoring. Most times they are lined up to see her. When there are no students, she is able to get all of her marking done. Students see me for more than just tutoring. I facilitate educational programming. Because I have been unable to keep up with the marking, and seeing the help students are getting with a part time teacher, I need to choose between curriculum and change.

I recognize there are days when I am unable to teach at all because of administrative and counselling work involved at Education Plus (see Appendix D for sample day). The next step would be to follow what would be best for the students, the ability to find success. Perhaps workshops, community involvement, and new programming are the answers. The true solution lies with the Outreach student who leads the way in Outreach education.

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Appendix A

Letter to Deans of Education

Dear Deans of Education;

I am an educator in the field of Outreach education and I currently teach at Education Plus in High River, Alberta. Outreach schools and programs are a successful alternative to the more traditional high school and our school focuses on academic growth through independent learning. The number of students taking responsibility for their own education measures our effectiveness. I am lucky to have the opportunity to work one-on-one with a variety of Outreach students in a truly unique setting.

Recently, the Foothills School Division ran a teacher vacancy posting for our Outreach school and the response from your recent graduates was minimal. I believe the lack of interest is because many of your graduates do not know teaching at an Outreach school is a rewarding experience. Outreach students are described as those who are at-risk of not completing their education and who do not fit into the traditional patterns of high school. Student abilities range from code 42's to high academics and they are usually between the ages of 15 to 19, although some Outreach schools offer junior high and adult programs. Student backgrounds are varied and include those who are teenage moms, live off the streets, play professional sports, or have to work to support themselves. Outreach education is an exciting career choice for your graduates and I invite you to include training in this field as part of the education faculty.

I believe that a major or a minor in Outreach education is a viable choice in today's educational climate. In addition to teaching a variety of subjects, counseling, administrative decision making, home education, funding, credit generation, working

with adult students, dealing with social agencies, fundraising, networking skills, public relations, business management, and advertising should be included in your program. A successful Outreach teacher must also be flexible, a team player, self-motivated and innovative, able to get involved in the community, and willing to embrace change. The variety of topics included in an Outreach teacher program will prepare your graduates for any teaching assignment.

The face of public education is changing. A practicum or intern position at an Outreach school will provide your education students with one-on-one teaching experiences, professional collaboration, and curriculum and program development that are at the forefront of change. I also encourage you to invite Outreach teachers to speak to your undergraduates, to accept Outreach teachers as associates for your educational program, and to hire them to teach professional development courses. Outreach schools and programs have gained momentum and I know that you will want to remain at the forefront of educational change in Alberta.

My hope is that your institution will offer the training necessary to prepare your education students to teach in the Outreach field. If you have any further concerns about preparing your graduates for teaching in an Outreach school in Alberta, please contact me at Education Plus or by email at isbergl@fsd38.ab.ca.

Sincerely,

Lori Isberg
Outreach Educator and Facilitator
Education Plus

Appendix B

Table 1 Student Enrollment

Type	Sept 1997	June 1998	Sept 1998	June 1999	Sept 1999	June 2000	Sept 2000	June 2001	Sept 2001
OU	37	49	34	45	26	64	35	72	36
BL	4	6	20	56	20	86	34	111	21
AD	5	5	3	9	2	4	4	9	3
CH	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	3	0
Total	46	64	61	118	56	166	78	205	63

OU: outreach

BL: blended

AD: adult

CH: challenge

Table 2 Credit Earned Units

Month	June 1998	June 1999	June 2000	June 2001
Total	431	812	943	1486

Appendix C

Sample Orientation Package

DATE: _____

ORIENTATION CHECKLIST

OUTREACH

- Forms: registration, cumulative file request, computer contracts
- Graduation plan and yearly goal
- Work experience – are you working?
- Physical Activity – are you involved in any sports, physically active?
- Special Projects – hobbies, extracurricular, or volunteer work?
- Goal Setting Meetings and Going Over Assignment Booklets
- Meeting with Family School Liason Counsellor booked

RE's

- Forms: registration and referral
- Term Contract – read and signed by student and parent
- Not meet term contract – what options are there

GENERAL LIST

- Forms in and signed
- Fees Collected
- Attendance policy
- Sign in sheet
- Work Ethic/expectations
- School Rules
- How modules/courses work & expectations
- Textbooks
- Marking Scheme (60/40 split)
- Where to put completed assignments and exams
- Rewrites
- Material – must return before final
- Goal setting done and signed
- Completion deadlines understood (term and individual)
- Diploma exam dates and deadline for course completion
- Mid-review appointment booked
- Making appointments & rebooking expectations
- Pre-requisites checked via AB Learning Transcripts
- Exit summary from previous school

Goals and Scheduling For: (Student Name)

Date:

Course:	Due Date:	Course:	Due Date:
Module 1		Module 1	
Module 2		Module 2	
Module 3		Module 3	
Module 4		Module 4	
Module 5		Module 5	
Module 6		Module 6	
Module 7		Module 7	
Module 8		Module 8	
Final		Final	

Term Contract Ends:

Diploma Exam Dates:

Courses to Complete Semester 1	Courses to Complete Semester 2

Signatures

 x _____
 student

 x _____
 Lori Isberg

*Meet with Lori on _____ (date) _____ at _____ (time) _____ for mid-review.

Appendix D

A Sample Day

-taken directly from Lori's journal, dated January 31, 2000.

Today was a full day. My first appointment was waiting for me when I arrived at the school in the morning. The students kept flowing throughout the day. I had ten appointments booked with students, the majority being new which require a lot of time to set up including orientation, past academic histories, and future goals. I like to spend an hour with each but I ended up rebooking students to finish off the process because I was running out of time. In addition, there were a number of walk-ins (those students making inquiries or coming for the local high school to enroll in a course.) I feel that it is important for me to list the types of students I deal with on a regular basis and to process this day, which was overwhelming and becoming the norm.

My first appointment was with a student who decided to leave the high school and come to Ed Plus full time. She did attend here last year. I talked to her about what was going on at the high school, found out what she was willing to do to be a success here and I went over how things work here now compared to last year. We talked about the courses she wanted to do, set up a goal sheet and registration, and got her going on a course.

My next appointment was with a student from England who wants to go to the University of Calgary but needs three courses. She felt that she has taken the courses in England but the university will not recognize the courses. As an adult student she could either take the full courses or challenge the diploma exams. We went through the

consequences of both and she chose to challenge. She is moving to High River and will contact me to set up another appointment.

I had to call the High River Business Development Centre to reschedule our meeting. There was no time today for what I feel is an important community connection. So many of my students need help in finding a career path, writing resumes, and holding a job. I want to get HBDC involved, since it follows under their Youth Connections mandate, with the outreach students that come to Education Plus.

Another appointment was with a student who quit school last year, is working part time and wants to graduate with year so he can get into the RCMP. This was our second meeting; the first was to go over educational possibilities and this one was to set up registration. I got his course marks from Alberta Learning and we set up the courses he needed to graduate. He choose the one he wanted to start with, however it was one that I had not done before and so I needed time to develop the course. He will tackle it when the course is ready and choose a different course. He worked all day, asking a lot of questions about expectations.

I had two students from the high school come in and register. One wanted a course that we did not have and she was not willing to wait for it to be ordered through Learning resource Development Centre (LRDC). I had to call her counsellor at the school to ensure that what she wanted to do instead would still make graduation requirements. We then went through the intake process for blended students. The other student came in to set up an appointment for later in the day. He showed up with his mother and we followed the intake process. I had to deflect negative comments from the mother regarding the high school.

Another student came in who has not been in school for a couple of years. The last time he was in school he scored zero on all his subjects. He seemed to think that he could do all ten level subjects. I told him that due to his actions of the past, his consequences were to be placed in lower levels. We came to an agreement that if he worked really hard and proved me wrong, I would bump him up a level. I had to spend a lot of time with him to figure out whether he was serious or not. We went through the Outreach intake process.

An Outreach student, who hasn't been in for awhile and who has not handed in any work, came in. I told her that since she was not being responsible that I would have to treat her accordingly. I gave her tight timelines for follow or face being placed on a leave of absence, which would translate into her not graduating on time. I told her she was too scattered, full of excuses, and that she had gone too far. Although she was not happy, she accepted what I was saying and agreed to the terms I laid out.

Another student came in who was short one credit from graduating last year. I pulled her course marks to see if there was an error made but we could not find one. We talked about what she wanted to do for a career and found a course that suited the direction she was going in.

I met with a student's grandmother who is at a loss of what to do. I told her to tell her grandson to come in and see me. She phoned from home and had me talk to him. He showed up and he talked about how he has been snowing me with his excuses. He admitted to lying and I admitted to knowing that he was lying. I explained how his lying affected how I saw him as a person. We talked about what was going on in his life, the police charges he was facing, and how he was feeling. We discussed his need to focus on

one thing and he choose work since he had fines to pay to avoid going to jail. He handed in his work that he had done, and I told him to come back when he got his life straightened out. I gave him some advice about work and how to go about applying and I encouraged him to come in and use the computers for his resume. I figured this would keep his interest in the school even though he was not attending. We also discussed what was happening with his friends. He realizes that they are bringing him down and I asked him if he had a plan to make changes. He did not and we worked through some scenarios. He left saying thanks for the help and that he wished he had talked to me sooner. I told him not to be a stranger and wished him luck, hoping things would work out.

In addition to the set appointments, the school was full with students working on their courses. I would finish with one student and then work with another on questions they had. I was really frustrated working with a science twenty student who I could not help. I also had a student struggling with math. I am not a science or math teacher, yet I am the only teacher at our location. I tried to get them help from the other two Ed Plus locations but the teachers were unavailable. I made a point of letting the students know my frustration, that is was not directed at them, but at the situation of not having subject specialists for the high school courses. The students were also frustrated, ready to give up. I called the principal, explaining what was happening. He sympathized but there was no money to hire another teacher. Ed Plus students deserve the same level of education as any student in our Division. Why are they treated differently? I also had a student struggling with social and others asking if I had their material marked yet that they handed in two weeks ago. I started to become reactionary.

Realizing that the pace of the day was getting to me, I headed out the door for a quick walk around the block. When I got back, I found out that I had missed a student who I really needed to talk to. I then sat down and juggled administrative work, marking, teaching/tutoring students, getting course materials, and counselling students. I forgot to eat. I looked at the stack of marking; another full course worth of marking was handed in today. I do not know how I am going to get all of this done. Tomorrow is going to be the same. The school closed at 3:30, I stayed till 5:30 and then left, too tired to continue any longer.