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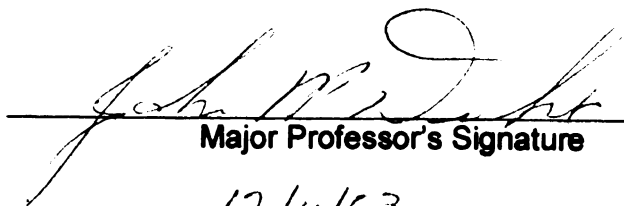
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**Higher, Adult, Life Long
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**ADULTS LEARNING TO REFLECT:
A STUDY OF ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR PRIVATE LEARNING**

By

Falinda Sue Hartsuff Geerling

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
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ABSTRACT

ADULTS LEARNING TO REFLECT: A STUDY OF THE ASSESSMENT OF PRIOR PRIVATE LEARNING

By

Falinda Sue Hartsuff Geerling

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a process used by many postsecondary institutions to award academic credit to adult learners for knowledge derived from life experiences. For the most part, PLA has focused on occupational or work-related experiences. A few institutions have extended this assessment process to significant life experiences not related to work such as divorce, job loss, or drug and alcohol recovery. However, we know relatively little about adult learners' experiences in these programs. The life events that are often the focus of this process represent powerful, affective or emotional experiences in the learners' lives. For this reason, we sought to develop a deeper understanding of their experiences with such a process. In-depth interviews were conducted with six learners enrolled in an accelerated, degree-completion program at Covenant College. The adults' experiences in the assessment module reflect a preoccupation with meeting its technical or instrumental challenges. While they describe strong feelings and emotions associated with this process, there is less evidence that the process facilitates a reworking of their prior experiences or greater self-awareness as learners.

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2003

DEDICATION

In loving memory of

**My grandmother, Leota Melba Taylor, who would have been 98 years young
tomorrow, October 21, 2003, and continues to be my role model and guardian angel**

and

**My friend, Diane Teska, who at 37 died too young, but remains my inspiration and
muse**

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- **Dr. Stephen Kaagan, teacher and role model**
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Chapter One

Introduction

With the increased number of adults returning to college and the growth of higher education catering to their needs, Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) has become a common practice among colleges and universities. Prior Learning Assessment is a process in which the adult students' experiences outside of the college classroom are evaluated based on standards established by the institution. College credit is then granted based on those standards.

For the most part, these standards call for the students' experiences to be occupational or work-related. Since 1974, the Council of Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), which has been a leader in promoting PLA, has set the following as its number one priority: to research and promote the formal assessment and recognition of college-level learning of two kinds not commonly recognized by credit or advancement in standing: 1) that acquired before the assessment by the current institution and not previously transcribed; 2) that acquired under the sponsorship of the current institution via practice, internships, apprenticeships, and other hands-on experiences occurring off campus (Lamdin, 1992, p. 68). In short, knowledge acquired by students within work or professional settings such as nursing, providing customer service, or computer programming receives top priority in the translation of "prior" learning experiences into college credits. In her text, Earn College Credit for What you Know, Lamdin (1992) cites almost 1,500 U.S. accredited institutions of higher education that provide some level of PLA for occupational related experiences. This list resulted from a survey conducted by CAEL in 1991.

However, none of these institutions has extended its practice of Prior Learning Assessment to include experiences other than work related. Therefore, Covenant College (CC)—a small, church-based, liberal arts institution in the Midwest—may be unique among institutes of higher learning in that it does have a program in which students may earn college credit for other than their work related experiences. The traditional methods of PLA--portfolio development and national standardized tests such as CLEP and DANTES—are also offered. These methods are based on the traditional occupational or previously non-transcribed knowledge. In its accelerated Adults Studies Program, CC also has a required PLA course in each of its three major curricula. This course is called WRT 312, Critical Analysis and Research Writing. It provides a way for its adult students to earn college credit for alternative ways of knowing.

For the purposes of this study, these ways of knowing will be referred to as “private learning.” This is knowledge that comes from experiences in the context or setting of the home or family life. Examples of this kind of learning would be knowledge about marriage, parenting, divorce, disease, or death. Furthermore, knowledge acquired in the context or setting of work or the community will now be referred to as “public learning.” For the purposes of this study, Prior Learning Assessment will now be referred to as the process of defining, documenting, measuring, evaluating, and granting credit for learning acquired through [work or occupational] experiences (Lamdin, 1992, p. 244). Assessment of Prior Private Learning (APPL) will be referred to as the process in which home or family life experiences are evaluated and granted college credits. In addition to the different

contexts in which these two kinds of learning take place, another distinction is that private learning tends to have more of an affective or emotional dimension. Thus, when it is being assessed in a public setting such as a college, it may be more problematic than the assessment of public learning.

However, in contrast to work-related PLA, there is relatively little information on the life-related APL or how it is experienced by adult learners. There does seem to be strong affective or emotional component of APL, in contrast to the more cognitive or rational nature of PLA. Because of this apparent difference and lack in the literature of the seemingly more affective APL, the purpose of this research study is to develop a deeper understanding of how returning adult learners experience the assessment of their private learning.

From the following brief history of the development of Prior Learning Assessment, it will be shown that very little, if any, research has been focused on APL and why this oversight seems worthy of further study.

The Research Rationale

For some 30 years, beginning after WWII and throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the public credentialing educational “movement” and the private, non-credentialing, training “movement” grew along side of each other. With the “emergence of the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) in the United States as the energetic leader for PLA, a pattern for its development was established” (Thomas, 2001, p. 516). Thomas adds that “while PLA continues to grow worldwide, the combination of specific demand and supply that existed in the United States remains . . . unique to [this] country” (2001, p. 515).

Kett (1994) supports this notion. He says,

While set within the context of demographic change, the phenomenon of college reentry in the 1970s and 1980s cannot be explained merely by the aging of the population. Both the size of the pool and the rate of enrollment increased among older students, who enrolled primarily to acquire degrees in such fields as business, engineering, health, and computer science. (Kett, 1994, p. 431)

In the United States, Prior Learning Assessment has grown the fastest in technical colleges, “where objectives can be most clearly identified and demonstrated.” In other academic areas such as medicine or law, there is “less ‘supply-side’ initiative; the information [about PLA] . . . penetrates populations more slowly” (Thomas, 2001, p. 517).

Yet, employees, workers, and others outside of the middle class professions and academy are still confronted with the overwhelming barriers of the bureaucratically structured, multi-leveled sequence of related jobs and the corresponding, required educational certificates that are needed to step up that cherished career ladder (Kett, 1994, p 433). Kett (1994) also points out these cultural norms could have been otherwise. For instance, governments and corporations could have decided to use “fewer highly credentialed employees” (p. 433). However, because organizations tend to hire those who are like themselves, managers write job descriptions that include educational credentials like their own in the name of fairness and efficiency.

According to Thomas (2001), with its promise of acknowledging learning outcomes achieved by workers and other “outsiders” to the bureaucratic systems of education and business in our society, PLA offers a unique opportunity for these students in their existing and familiar cultural roles to at last confront, with some confidence, sectors of the formal education system that have appeared impenetrable. Thomas adds that PLA is also an opportunity for the “cultural reformation of education” (p. 517).

Just as many see PLA as an opportunity for educational reform in the academy, many others either misunderstand or dismiss it. Their main complaint is PLA is not college-level learning, so how could they possibly evaluate and grant college credit for the learning outcomes or learning process presented by the learners themselves. Perhaps as a counter balance to this criticism, PLA has been studied quite extensively by its greatest supporter, CAEL (Flint & Associates, 1999), and others; most notably, Mandell & Michelson (1990), Michelson (1996a; 1996b; 1996c, 1997), and Whitaker (1989). However, there seems to be no literature on APL. Michelson talks about one program at the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI) in Canada. This program uses portfolio development to explore “a wide range of individual and collective learning” (Michelson, 1997, p. 44). According to Michelson (1997), a partnership between FNTI and Loyalist College allows students in this Tyendinaga Mohawk territory in southeastern Ontario, who are majoring in human service fields, to apply for credit for prior learning and to earn diplomas that are the equivalent to U.S. associate’s degrees (p. 45).

FNTI's approach to the assessment of prior learning has developed in the aboriginal or native traditions and history. Michelson (1997) explains,

According to their [FNTI aboriginal faculty] approach, the first peoples of North America have a collective experience of "ethnostress" caused by the violent conquest leading to cultural and economic dislocation. That dislocation continues to disrupt collective and personal identity, producing such social problems as alcohol dependency, child abuse, and chronic unemployment, and contributing to numerous psychic and intellectual scars that interfere with the ability to learn. (p. 45)

Michelson points out that this approach to Prior Learning Assessment, structured in FNTI's portfolio development or "documented portraits," is based on two principles of aboriginal teachings that differ distinctly from "European traditions of knowledge" (p. 45).

First, rather than assuming that learning is essentially a cognitive process, portfolio development at FNTI is grounded in aboriginal perspectives about knowledge that put the spirit, not the head, at the core. "Humans are physical beings endowed with mind and heart (emotions) and empowered by spirit" (Hill, 1995, p. 43, as cited in Michelson, 1997, p. 45) Learning is a holistic process that requires the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical aspects of self. (p. 45)

Nevertheless, according to Michelson (1997), because Loyalist College is FNTI's accrediting partner in the human services fields, the portfolios that are used as the basis for college credits must meet imposed definitions of competence as well as

FNTI's definitions. Thus, the section of the students' portfolios that is devoted to application for credit uses a narrow definition of competence as "the things you know how to do" (p. 47). In other words, the students' prior "life experiences" and the resulting knowledge that was produced in private and under a great deal of emotional and psychological stress is reduced to "a series of competency statements" that use both "task analysis" and "learning analysis" and follow the usual logic of portfolio development; namely, they distinguish between what students have done and what they learned cognitively and rationally (Michelson, 1997, p. 47).

But what if that spiritual or emotional learning was assessed for credit for prior learning? What if in order to earn college credits for prior learning, the students' knowledge did not have to derive from professional experiences or match some specific institutional courses, as it is in most PLA-granting colleges and universities in North America? What would that program look like and what would be the nature of this experience? Furthermore, during this Assessment of Prior Private Learning process, how would the students describe the learning that they experience? How would they describe the key characteristics or attributes of this learning? And finally, how do they navigate the transition from private learners to public students? What is the nature of this transition? In the 30 years since PLA programs first began to gain momentum and acceptance in higher education, these questions have yet to be studied. This is a serious gap in the literature of PLA and therefore is the rationale for this research proposal.

I have also observed in my own practice and research (Geerling, 2000) that the PLA process affords the potential for either transformative learning (Mezirow,

1991) or the confirmation of prior self-development or self-transformation.

Therefore, the intent of this study was to add not only to my own knowledge, but also to both the experience-based and transformative learning discourses in adult education.

The Theoretical Framework of the Research

Prior Learning Assessment and specifically Assessment of Prior Private Learning are both grounded in two well known adult learning theories; namely, experiential learning (i.e., learning by doing) and adult learning for personal development and change (i.e., learning from prior experience). Perhaps the best known experiential learning theorist is David A. Kolb (1984). In his seminal work, Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development has spawned many other studies, theories, and practices in adult learning and teaching (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Mezirow, 1990). For instance, at CC Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning is used in the APL process as the basis for writing or organizing documents called Life Learning Papers (LLP). These papers are then used by faculty and other trained evaluators to determine the equivalent college credits for the experiential learning demonstrated within them.

Learning to write and earning college credits for prior learning are the primary purpose of APL. Yet both my professional experience and the literature support the notion that the students also gain more awareness of themselves as persons. As they revisit and reconstruct painful and hurtful prior private experiences, the learners often stir up strong feelings and emotions with which they are faced with a choice—either reconcile with them as they write their Life Learning Paper or risk failing the writing

module and perhaps the entire program (Dirkx, 1997). Although this may not be an intentional outcome of the assessment of prior learning process, it is grounded in what Pratt (1998) calls either the developmental” or “nurturing” perspective of adult teaching and learning.

The Research Problem

In order to make a contribution to the scholarship that frames this research, that is, adult learning, in general, and experiential or experience-based learning, in particular, I propose to study the following question: What is the nature of the experience that Covenant College Adult Studies students have in the Assessment of Prior Private Learning course, WRT 312, Critical Analysis and Research Writing?

The following subquestions are also proposed:

1. How do students describe the learning that they experience from APL?
2. How do students describe the key characteristics or attributes of this learning?
3. How do students describe how they navigated the transition from private learners to public students? What is the nature of the transition?

The Analytical Framework for the Research

With regard to data analysis, I plan to combine the guidelines of both Seidman (1991) and Strauss (1987). In both Seidman’s in-depth or phenomenological interviewing analysis and Strauss’s modified grounded theory analysis, they recommend that the researcher begins collecting data before any hypotheses or problems have been formulated, other than the general ones. In this way, the

researcher stays very close to the data and the hypotheses, problems, and questions come out of that phenomenon or data. Eventually, profiles (Seidman's term) or axils (Strauss's term) emerge from the evidence. These categories are further defined or refined until a full, dense phenomenological or modified grounded theory is written. In this study the latter is the intention.

Definitions of Terms for the Research

Adult Students: college or university students who are older than traditional higher education students, that is, at least 23 years old; financially self-supporting; usually working at least part time; usually female; married, divorced, or single parents with at least one child; sometimes responsible for aging family members.

Adult Learners: adult students who enter college or university classrooms with a vast amount of learning or knowledge that was gained in other contexts such as personal or professional experiences.

Assessment of Prior Private Learning (APPL): the interface or context in which public learning and private learning meet; a process in which adult students earn college credit (public acknowledgment or recognition) for their private learning; a process in which adult learners make public or formalize their informal or private learning; a transitional procedure from adult learners to adult students, usually demonstrated via a formal examination, an interview, or a portfolio; at Covenant College the APL demonstration is an average 25-page paper formatted upon Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning.

Private Learning: personal, private, informal, nonformal contexts in which mostly adults acquire knowledge; e.g. work, career, hobby, marriage, divorce.

Public Learning or Education: formal, controlled contexts for acquiring knowledge, designed mainly for children and adolescents; e.g. elementary through postsecondary schools.

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA): See Assessment of Prior Private Learning (APPL).

Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning: first espoused by David Kolb in 1984; as applied in PLA at CC, this theory states that the cycle of experiential learning has four modes or centers of activity, beginning with a concrete experience (CE) that is distinguished by its feelings and relationships; next, reflective observations (RO) are distinguished by its thoughts and insights into the perspectives or interpretations of the CE; third, abstract concept is the theory or principle that was learned from the synthesis of CE and RO and is first stated in the learner's own words and then supported by the literature from the appropriate academic discipline; last, active experimentation (AE) is the test or application of the AC both in a similar and a different context from the CE.

Life Learning Paper: documentation for PLA at CC; based most often on the personal, private learning of the adult students, the thesis statement usually includes three aspects or learning outcomes; each learning outcome is developed using Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning; may be used in three different ways—to earn college credit for prior learning; to earn credit for WRT 312; to waive English 102.

Intended Audiences for the Research

Because of the nature of this study, it is intended for the following audiences:

1. Adult Learners and Students

2. College and University Instructors and Professors
3. College and University Administrators

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I will provide the following: More description of the research and theory surrounding the assessment of prior learning; how the proposed study addresses some of the questions about the use of this process in assessing nonworking-related life experiences; and the theoretical frameworks that shape and inform how we might pursue these questions.

Development and Growth of PLA

Since 1974, Prior Learning Assessment and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning have grown together. “CAEL began as a three year project (1974-1977) of the Educational Testing Service (Princeton) under the name ‘Cooperative Assessment of Experiential Learning,’” according to Morris Keaton, former president of CAEL (as cited in Whitaker, 1989, p. xi).

That project was funded by the Carnegie Corporation, with later help from the Ford Foundation, the Lilly Endowment, and the fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (Whitaker, 1989, p. xiii). The result was the first CAEL publication that combined 26 previous CAEL books, monographs, and research reports. It was called Principles of Good Practice in the Assessment of Experiential Learning (Willingham, 1977), and for the next 12 years it “influenced the development of new roles for experiential learning and served as a guidepost for quality assurance” (Whitaker, 1989, p. viii).

After the initial three-year research and development effort, CAEL began to operate under a new charter as a free-standing association of colleges and universities

named the Council for the Advancement of Experiential Learning. Then, in 1985, it again changed its name to the Council of Adult and Experiential Learning to better reflect “. . . the emerging implications of its initial commitments,” according to Keaton (Whitaker, 1989, p. xi).

That same year Susan Simosko wrote the book, Earn College Credit for What you Know, which was published by CAEL, and in 1988, she wrote Assessing Learning: A CAEL Handbook for Faculty. Keaton points out, “With the Simosko handbook in place, there remained the task of providing a systematic explication of underlying standards and principles [of PLA]” (Whitaker, 1989, p. ix). This need was fulfilled by Urban Whitaker in 1989 with the CAEL publication, Assessing Learning: Standards, Principles, & Procedures, which replaced Willingham’s Principles and became the “Bible” for theorists and practitioners of experiential learning and Prior Learning Assessment.

Then, in a 1990 book published by CAEL, Mandell and Michelson described eight approaches and fourteen models of PLA. The authors were careful to point out that the eight approaches were not intended as “separate curricular outlines,” but as “emphases within a single intellectual exploration, clusters of interrelated concerns around which appropriate subject matter can be organized” (p. 4). These eight approaches included orientations toward: a) Academic Skills; b) College Orientation; c) Personal Exploration; d) The Meaning of Education; e) Careers; f) Introduction to a Field; g) The Experience of Work; and h) Degree Design.

Of the 14 programs that were chosen by the authors as exemplary of these approaches, only two used “Personal Exploration.” Sinclair Community College, in

Dayton, OH, combined this approach with a “Careers” orientation, so, in essence, its PLA program focuses more on work-related experiences than personal or family incidents. The Office of Continuing Studies, The American University, in Washington, DC, Assessment of Prior Learning Program (APEL) also has a “Personal Exploration” approach. However, this orientation looks at human experiences through the lens of social constructs such as gender, race, and culture. In both of these institutions, the purpose of the PLA portfolios seemed to be more of a means for the students to articulate their professional and academic goals than to translate their nonacademic learning experiences into college credits. None of the processes or models described by Mandell and Michelson involved the assessment of adult knowledge based on personal or private experiences.

In 1999, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning commissioned a benchmarking study in collaboration with the American Productivity & Quality Center. This organization was founded by C. Jackson Grayson Jr. in 1977. In 1992, it established a service called the International Benchmarking Clearinghouse. “Its purpose is to help organizations learn how to benchmark as well as to find, adapt, and implement ‘best practices,’” according to Grayson (Flint, et al, 1999, p. v).

For this study’s objectives, it is not necessary to go into the details of the CAEL/APQC study, except to say that out of the 34 institutions that responded to a screening survey, six were chosen for further study based on 16 descriptors of “best processes in adult learning, not best institutions” (Flint, et al, 1999, p. 16). What is of interest to this study is that all six institutions used some form of PLA; yet, not one came close to using the same process as Covenant College. Of the five institutions

that had established programs (one program was only two years old at the time of the study), they all used portfolios linked to specific courses with essays and work- or education-based documentation.

Nevertheless, the scholarship of experiential learning has significantly contributed to the growth and development of Prior Learning Assessment (PLA). Some of the PLA research hinted at the affective dimension of the process. Students gained a greater appreciation of learning across the life span, as a result of developing their PLA portfolios, reported Richard Roughton, executive director of The Office of Continuing Studies:

Students take much pride in their completed portfolios. When they receive their credit awards there is a strong sense of accomplishment, accompanied by a great sigh of relief. At the same time students are aware that the experience has united varied forms of learning and can see the rest of formal education not simply as unfinished business but as another step in a process that has spanned their lives. (Mandell & Michelson, 1990, p. 81)

Brenda Krueger, former director of Sinclair College's Credit for Lifelong Learning Program (CLLP), concurred with Roughton, "Students . . . learn how to extract learning from experience, and they take this new awareness of the potential for experiential learning with them into present and future experiences. They are far better equipped to be lifelong learners" (as cited in Mandell & Michelson, 1990, p. 61). Krueger continued:

It became evident that earning college credits was only one outcome of the portfolio development process for many students. While they may have

entered CLLP to earn college credits, other outcomes became more important than this original goal. Both statistics and students' subjective feedback indicate that the objectives of the course are being met, as is the broader purpose of meeting the needs of the Sinclair adult population. . . . The comment of one student is more encouraging than any statistic. She wrote: "I would highly recommend this course to anyone starting or returning to college at age thirty-five or over even if there wasn't one competency that earned credit." (Mandell & Michelson, 1990, p. 62)

Thus, there is evidence of experience-based learning that is occurring through the process of Prior Learning Assessment. Yet, there is very little information about how this learning occurs or what form it takes. The question remains, What is the nature of the learning that occurs in PLA courses or seminars? How are adults changed from anxious, confused, insecure students into confident, secure lifelong learners? What elements of the PLA process contribute to this remarkable transition? Very few studies have focused on PLA as a learning phenomenon. A review of the literature in this area revealed no studies that explore the nature of the learning that transpires as adult students assess their life or private experiences before entering a college classroom and transform them into acceptable forms that will earn them college credits.

Moreover, the studies that have been done in regard to PLA have been done on programs that focus on work-related or public experiences. These processes stress knowledge, specific cognitive competencies, or skills that learners derive from experiences within particular occupations. For example, both programs that were

noted above—Sinclair Community College and The American University, The Office of Continuing Studies—use an academic structure of required texts, weekly classroom sessions, written learning objectives, and student activities and assignments. The assessment of prior experiential learning is only one objective out of four or five for both PLA processes. For instance, at Sinclair CC,

Students in CLLP [Credit for Lifelong Learning Program] . . . do not only articulate prior learning, they are expected to acquire *new*, college level learning as a result of the course. They learn how to develop life and career goals and an action plan for making those goals a reality. It is equally important that they develop the ability to extract learning from experiences, a skill that has applications in their future as well as their past. (Mandell & Michelson, 1990, p. 55).

Although Sinclair CC, The Office of Continuing Education, and other PLA programs see articulation of old knowledge and the acquisition of new knowledge as equally important, they appear to have paid little attention to the notion of equity between the affective and cognitive dimensions of learning or between private or public experiences. While the literature on formal learning experiences stresses the importance of the affective or emotional dimension of learning, there is almost no attention to this aspect in the scholarship of assessment of prior learning.

In modern English-speaking cultures the affective dimension of learning is often overlooked or denied. Yet, “[e]motions and feelings are key pointers to both possibilities for, and barriers to, learning” (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1993, p. 15). Two key sources within the learners’ context either positively or negatively influence

them; that is, their past experience and the role of others. Their confidence and self-esteem also affect their learning. “Engagement with learning tasks is related to belief in success” (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1993, p. 15). For learners to learn successfully from their prior experience, they must weave a course of reliance on their own past experience and acceptance of the support or challenge from others. In other words they must acknowledge the tension between their own agency and the influence of others in the process of making meaning of their experience.

This is the situation or context in which Covenant College adult students find themselves as they move into the second course or module of their program. It is an experience-based learning environment that has yet to be studied, and therefore it seems that research of this kind is long overdue. There appears to be a missing link between the theory and practice of PLA. Perhaps by better understanding the nature of the learning in a PLA classroom, especially when the experiences being assessed tend to be emotionally charged, adult educators could improve their practice both in a PLA and non-PLA classroom.

Prior Learning Assessment and specifically Assessment of Prior Private Learning are both grounded in two well known theoretical orientations to adult learning: experiential or experience-based learning and learning for personal development and change or learning from prior experience.

Theoretical Framework

APPL as Framed in Experiential or Experience-based Adult Learning

One of the most well-known models or theories of experiential or experience-based learning is that of David A. Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning. His

Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning

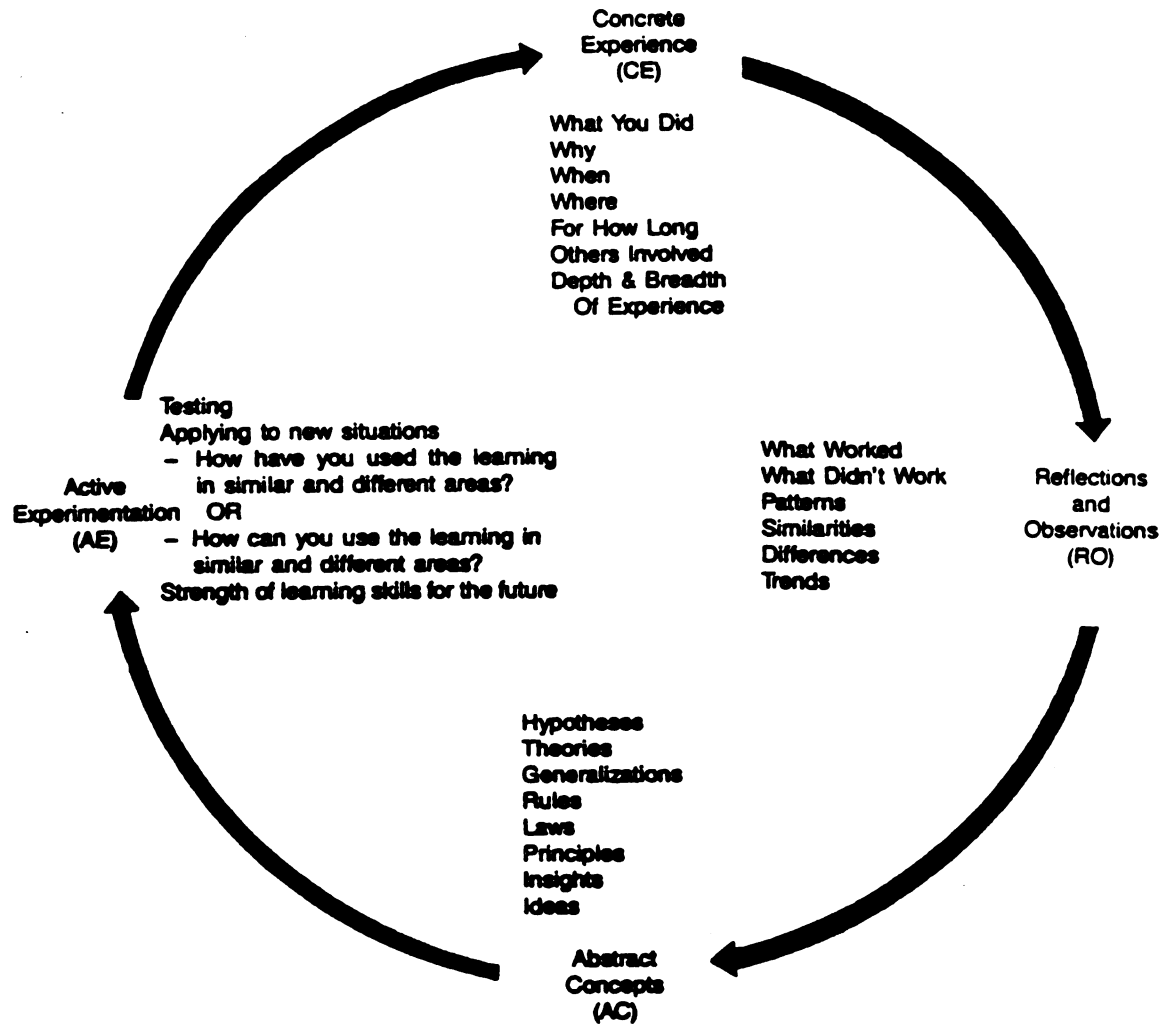


Figure 1

(Basic Model from D. A. Kolb and R. Fry, "Toward an Applied Theory of Experiential Learning," Cary Cooper, ed. Theories of Group Processes, Lond/News: John Wiley and Sons, 1975.)

seminal work, Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development, has spawned many other studies, theories, and practices in adult learning and teaching (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Mezirow, 1990).

Kolb (1984) defines learning as “the process of whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). He adds that this definition “emphasizes several critical aspects of the learning process as viewed from the experiential perspective” (p. 38). These include: 1) the emphasis on the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to content or outcomes; 2) knowledge is a transformation process, constantly changing and developing, not an acquisition process in which it is gained and transmitted; 3) learning transforms experience both objectively (i.e., the person’s environment) and subjectively (i.e., the person’s internal state); 4) to understand learning, the nature of knowledge must be understood and vice versa (pp. 36 & 38).

Knowledge, according to Kolb (1984), is the result of the transaction between social knowledge and personal knowledge. This transaction occurs in a process called learning. Hence, learning is both a process and an outcome. The outcome is knowledge. To understand epistemology—the origins, nature, methods, and limits of knowledge—one must understand the psychology of learning and vice versa (pp. 37-38).

In his Model of Experiential Learning, Kolb (1984) attempts to explain this dialectic tension between the objective and subjective nature of learning and knowledge. He graphically depicts his theory as a circle with the following “four

adaptive learning modes” or centers of activity: 1) Concrete Experience (CE); 2) Reflective Observations (RO); 3) Abstract Concepts (AC); 4) Active Experimentation (AE). (See Figure 1.) Kolb (1984) describes these CE/AC and RO/AE axes as “two distinct dimensions, each representing two dialectically opposed adaptive orientations” (pp. 40–41). He further explains:

The structural bases of the learning process lie in the transactions among these four adaptive modes and the way in which the adaptive dialectics get resolved. To begin with, notice that the abstract/concrete dialectic is one of *prehension*, representing two different and opposed processes of grasping or taking hold of experience in the world—either through reliance on conceptual interpretation and symbolic representation, a process I will call *comprehension*, or through reliance on the tangible, felt qualities of immediate experience, what I call *apprehension*. The active/reflective dialectic, on the other hand, is one of *transformation*, representing two opposed ways of transforming that grasp or “figurative representation” of experience—either through internal reflection, a process I will call *intention*, or active external manipulation of the external world, here called *extension*. (p. 41)

With this structure and definition of experiential learning, Kolb says, “Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it. And since there are two dialectically opposed forms of prehension and, similarly, two opposed ways of transforming that prehension, the result is four different elementary forms of knowledge” (pp. 41–42). Kolb (1984) calls these forms *divergent* knowledge (experience grasped through apprehension (CE) and transformed through

intension (RO)), *assimilative* knowledge (experience grasped through comprehension (AC) and transformed through intention (RO)), *convergent* knowledge (experience grasped through comprehension (AC) and transformed through extension (AE)), and *accommodative* knowledge (experience grasped by apprehension (CE) and transformed by extension (AE)) (p. 42). In essence, Kolb's Model of Experience Learning demonstrates that "learning, and therefore knowing, requires *both* a grasp or figurative representation of experience and some transformation of that representation" (p. 42). Neither the former nor the latter can work alone. Simply perceiving an experience cannot be called learning, and there can be no transformation alone without some state or experience to change or transform. This particular aspect of Kolb's work was informed by Piaget (1971, 1978). Kolb was also influenced by other earlier theorists of experiential learning such as Dewey (1934, 1938, 1958, 1910) and Lewin (1951).

At CC, Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning is also used in the APPL process as the basis for both critically thinking about and organizing the Life Learning Papers. In other words the adult students learn how to write by writing, in general, and in using Kolb's Model, in particular, as a model for critically reflecting upon and writing about their prior experience. The resulting documents are then used by faculty and other trained evaluators to determine the equivalent college credits for the prior experiential learning demonstrated within them.

APPL as Framed as Adult Learning for Personal Development and Change or Learning from Prior Experience

Although learning to write and earning college credits for prior learning are the primary purposes of APPL, both my professional experience and the literature support the notion that the students also gain more awareness of themselves as persons and lifelong learners. This outcome is grounded in the perspective of human developmental or growth potential of learning or learning from prior experience. According to Merriam and Caffarella (1991), the two psychologists who have contributed the most to this perspective are Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers.

“Maslow (1970), considered the founder of humanistic psychology, proposed a theory of human motivation based on a hierarchy of needs” (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991, p. 132). This deficit model, often graphically depicted as a pyramid, shows physiological needs such as food and water, at the bottom or base of the hierarchy. As with all the needs, these must be met before humans can deal with the next level of need, that is, shelter and safety. The levels then proceed upward through the need for social acceptance and love, self-esteem, and finally self-actualization. Maslow defined this last, most challenging level as a person’s desire to become all that he or she is capable of becoming. For him, self-actualization is the goal of learning and educators should strive to bring this about (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991, pp. 132-133).

Both Maslow (1970) and Rogers (1983) viewed learning as a form of psychotherapy. “In fact, his “client-centered therapy” is often equated with student-centered learning. In both education and therapy, Rogers is concerned with significant learning that leads to personal growth and development” (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991, p. 133).

The characteristics of this orientation toward learning include the following:

1. **Personal involvement**—the affective and cognitive aspects of a person should be involved in the learning event.
2. **Self-initiated**—a sense of discovery must come from within.
3. **Pervasive**—the learning makes a difference in the behavior, the attitudes, perhaps even the personality of the learner.
4. **Evaluated by the learner**—the learner can best determine whether the experience is meeting a need.
5. **Essence is meaning**—when experiential learning takes place, its meaning to the learner becomes incorporated into the total experience. (Merriam and Caffarella, 1991, pp. 133-134)

Tennant (2000) points out that many other scholars have been influenced by the work of Maslow and Rogers. These include Havighurst, Erickson, Levinson, Gould, Loevinger, and Labouvie-Vief (p. 88). However, the adult development and change orientation toward learning is not without its critics. Most notable is Gilligan (1986), who was among the first to challenge what she considered the dominant male perspective on adult development. In particular, she argues that such terms as “separateness,” “autonomy,” and “independence,” which are common markers of developmental progress, are essentially male values and that females value relationships and responsibilities, empathy and attachment, and interdependence rather than independence. In short, the developmental learning literature gives too little focus on the power of social forces in shaping the courses of peoples’ lives (Tennant, 2000, pp. 88-89).

Whether developmental adult learning is too “self”-centered is beyond the scope of this proposed study. But it is an important theoretical underpinning of the assessment of prior learning process. What is of interest here is Tennant’s notion of a more balanced theory of adult learning, that is, the understanding of self as a narrative or story. “In this view, identity is essentially a psychosocially constructed narrative that integrates the reconstructed past, perceived present and anticipated future; in short, it is a story of the self” (Tennant, 2000, p. 93).

Because the Life Learning Papers are, in essence, the students’ stories about what, how, and why they have learned from their prior experiences, APPL may be an ideal setting for adult learners to have an opportunity to retell their narratives and find not only new or deeper meaning of their life stories, but also of their sense of self. “The basic function of a life story is integration—it binds together disparate elements of the self” (Tennant, 2000, p. 94).

Tennant (2000) concludes his discussion of self-narration by pointing out that other theories of adult education such as Brookfield’s (1995) critical reflection and Mezirow’s (1991) critical self-assessment all use the same “lens” to look at self, that is, autobiography. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental difference between this literary form and Tennant’s notion of self-narration. He points out that Brookfield’s notion of “autobiography is not seen as something that is open to reinterpretation and re-authoring. Instead, it is seen as something that needs to be “unearthed” so as to expose its influence on our beliefs and practices [as individuals in social contexts and roles]” (p. 97).

In contrast, the self-narrative is conceptualized as an accurate foundation or discovery of beliefs and practices, which is accomplished through the reflection on and confrontation of distorted assumptions, attitudes, and behaviors by the means of storytelling. “The emphasis at the outset then is on discovery rather than creation: the questions posed are, ‘Who am I?’ and, ‘Have I got it right?’ and, “What is the secret of my desire?”” However, an autobiography is used to answer questions such as “Is this rendering of experience/autobiography desirable?” and, ‘What relationships can be invented or modulated through such a rendering of the self?’” In other words, with self-narrative the meaning of self in a society or culture becomes “problematized” or “discovered.” But with autobiography it is an exploration of multiple relationships, possibilities, or positions “in terms of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and [ability]” (Tennant, 2000, p. 98). With the former it is a question of discovery and creation of self. With the latter it is more a description and explanation of self. The nature of the Life Learning Papers could be defined as more self-narrative than autobiographic, and thus Tennant’s (2000) distinction between these two ways of thinking and writing about self is important to this study.

Finally, Bereiter (1990) distinguishes in his discussion of educational learning theory the difference between “schoolwork” or task-learning context and an “intentional” or personal learning context, which often occurs “outside school contexts.” Bereiter (1990) offers evidence of how these two “learning modules” could be brought together, that is, studies on writing suggest that older learners are more successful than younger ones in planning how to incorporate both schoolwork writing and intentional writing in order to fulfill both their academic and personal

goals. How or why this incorporation or acquisition of “knowledge telling” and “knowledge transforming” occurs over time has yet to be studied longitudinally. But since Assessment of Prior Private Learning seems to a setting where these two kinds of learning experiences (i.e., schoolwork and personal) come together, this study is intended to add to the research and discourse of experience-based or adult learning and development theory.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The overall purpose of this study was to add to the scholarship of experiential or experience-based learning, Prior Learning Assessment, and adult learning (i.e., development, change, or transformation of self). Because of my present teaching practice and prior research (Geerling, 2000), these discourses were of particular interest to me. I have observed the powerful and deep learning experiences that adult learners seem to have by revisiting or reconstructing often private or personal episodes in their lives. Thus my purpose in this study was to draw a clearer word picture or description of what this experience-based adult learning looks like.

The overarching research question that I posed was, What is the nature of the experience that students in Covenant College Adult Studies Program have in the Assessment of Prior Private Learning course, Critical Analysis and Research Writing.

The subquestions were:

1. How do students enrolled in Covenant College describe their experiences in this course?
2. How do students describe the transition from private learners to public students? What is the nature of this transition?

Research Design

These questions were pursued through a qualitative research design. The focus of this study was on the learners' experiences within the APPL program. For this reason the overall approach is informed by phenomenological method (Seidman, 1991) and to a lesser degree ethnographic procedures (Spradley, 1999?). As with all

qualitative or interpretive research frameworks, several assumptions informed and guided this study: 1) Reality is subjective and multiple; 2) Interaction with the study's informants will occur; 3) The sample will be purposeful; 4) The informants may or may not value their experiences with PLA as defined by CC; 5) No hypothesis will be proven; and 6) Limited generalizability of the study is expected.

Context and Setting

Founded in 1873 Covenant College (CC) is a small, church-based, liberal arts institution located in a small town in southwest Michigan. Beginning in the early 1980s with its accelerated, degree-completion adult studies program, the college has expanded throughout the state. It now has four regions (north, central, east, and west). Throughout each region there are several offices. Thus the students, who begin the program in cohorts of about 13, have convenient access to faculty, staff, parking, and the classrooms. Because of its "lock-step" nature, once the students start the program, they never have to register for a course or buy a book. These services are provided by the program's staff. .

In its Adult Studies Program, adult students complete their degrees (a maximum of 64 credits) in a matter of 58 to 72 weeks. There are several ways that this goal may be accomplished. First, the program's courses or "modules" are only four to six weeks. But when successfully completed, the students still earn between two and four college credits. Although there appears to be less "seat time" in this program, compared to traditional ones, more homework is required, particularly heavy reading and writing assignments. For each module more than half the student's

final grade is determined by the assessment of his or her final writing assignment, which is an 8 – 10 page “critical synthesis paper.” There are no objective tests.

A second alternative way that students may earn college credits is to take national assessment tests. There is a fee for taking these tests, which are scheduled throughout the academic year at either the regional sites or the local community colleges.

A third way is provided by the college itself. It is called “professional service and training (PST)” credits. The students, using appropriate documentation and form, petition trained faculty or other evaluators, who determine and grant equivalent college credits for the students’ professional or work-related learning experiences. Because of their history and background, both of these ways of earning college credits, whether national or institutional, tend to focus on the students’ instrumental (i.e., technical or mechanistic) or communicative skills and knowledge.

However, Covenant College also has another alternative way for its adult students to earn credit for their prior private experience, which tends to be more affective or expressive in nature and the learning or knowledge is more developmental or emancipatory in nature. It is called Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) or Assessment of Prior Private Learning (APPL) for the purposes of this study. The course in which this process is taught is called Critical Analysis and Research Writing.

This course was designed more than five years ago as a way to streamline the APPL process and to better meet the academic needs of CC’s adult students, in

particular, the fear of writing and mechanical weaknesses. The overview of the six-week course, which is the second required course in the program, is as follows:

Described most fundamentally, this module . . . is college-level thinking on paper. . . . This course is offered for several reasons: 1) To emphasize the importance of writing in your personal and professional lives; 2) To help you earn college credits for your life experiences; 3) To improve your writing skills as the primary tool for assessing your knowledge and understanding of the material in each core module. . . . Kolb's Model of Experiential learning is used to think about and reconstruct life-learning experiences on paper.

(Geerling & Hultman, 1999, p. 1)

Kolb's Model is introduced to the students during the second week of the course. During the first week's session, the students are introduced to a six-step writing process. As that material is presented in class, the students' first "critical synthesis paper" (CSP) from their first course is reviewed. This is their first high-risk (graded) assignment. The intent of that review is twofold: to determine whether the students have well written thesis statements in their first CSPs; and to emphasize the connection between "prewriting" and the thesis statement as they begin writing their life learning papers (LLPs). The prewriting techniques include "self-interviewing," "finding the instigating line or image," or "brainstorming" (Murray, 1998, pp. 3-6).

That night the students are also given possible topic guidelines, which have been approved by the appropriate college discipline or department such as psychology, sociology, or biology. These topics typically include "Psychology of Adjustment," (e.g., career transition), "Family Disorganization," (i.e., divorce), and

“Alcoholism” (i.e., the student’s or someone very close to him or her). But the topics can be as unusual as custom fitting luxury aircraft or treating hoof disease in horses. Whether common or rare, the topics are often determined by one conversation between the student and the academic advisor during the admission process. Moreover, they most often come from the adult student’s personal or private life experience. Rarely does a student write about his or her professional or work-related experience.

During that first week of Module Two the students are asked not only to revise and complete the final draft of their first critical synthesis paper, but also to begin thinking and writing about at least three “learning outcomes” from their experience that is topic of their life learning paper. These learning outcomes then became the aspects or subtopics of their LLPs’ “working thesis statements.” Each learning outcome is then developed within the paper according to Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning (Concrete Experience (CE), Reflective Observations (RO), Abstract Concepts (AC), and Active Experimentation (AE)). That development is called “once around the circle” and usually takes between six and eight pages.

By the third week, which, according to the curriculum, is “computer and library research night,” the students are expected to have one “circle” completed. By then, most students have a rudimentary understanding of Kolb’s Model and its application to their LLPs. The presentation of library research techniques, according to the curriculum, may be scheduled at a local community college library or done in the classroom.

Some peer review is also scheduled for that night. The papers are shared in small groups that may be determined by the same or similar topics of the students. As prescribed by the curriculum, the students read their papers out loud to each other and may use one of checklists provided in the module materials. These checklists are designed to help the students look critically not only at the content, but also the structure of their papers. The focus, however, for the peer review is on content and structure, that is, the proper use of Kolb's Model.

The fourth night, when two circles are expected to be done, is dedicated to peer review. The fifth week each student meets individually with the instructor for further review and revision of the paper. By then, a complete draft of the paper, including introduction and conclusion, is expected. The sixth week is reserved for additional individual conferences and for editing and proofreading between the individual students and the instructor.

The life learning paper is submitted on the seventh week of Module Two, that is, the 11th week of the program. Students may turn in as many as three copies—one for the instructor without any cover sheet, one for the academic advisor with a cover petition for the Assessment of Prior Private Learning office, and a third for the English department with a petition for an English waiver. Within another six to eight weeks the students receive notice through the mail from the APPL office whether they earned the college credits or must do a rewrite. If the former, they receive a small envelope, containing only a congratulatory letter and a copy of the evaluation form, indicating that their petition has been approved. If not, they receive a large envelope with a copy of their paper, along with the evaluation form and a letter from

the evaluator, stating what revisions must be made before resubmitting the paper for approval. The third and final option—"rejection"—is used only on rare occasions when a student inadvertently writes on a "restricted" (i.e., not allowed) topic in his program or is caught plagiarizing.

Selection of Participants

Potential participants were selected from members of two adult studies cohorts in two different regions of Covenant College. The researcher did not instruct Module Two or any other course for either group. The group consisted of fifteen women and one man; all were in their 30s. There were ten Caucasians and five Blacks. All worked either full time or part time in various professional positions and were majoring in either Family Life Education or Management of Organizational Development. They both were scheduled to graduate in 2003.

From this larger group of sixteen, through informed consent (see Appendix A), a purposeful sample of six informants was formed. Each was selected by his or her willingness to meet with the researcher for three interviews for a minimum of an hour each time. Each participant had successfully completed the module and earned a passing grade on his or her life learning paper. In that way the data was rich and robust for this qualitative study.

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Spradley (1979) was used to help focus on describing or interpreting the meaning in the language of the informants or participants. He calls it "folk terms." As a researcher he is aware of what he calls "translation competence," and he makes a conscious effort to have his informants use their own native language to describe their

experiences. Although Spradley's emphasis is primarily ethnographic, the guidelines that he recommends were very helpful in this study. As the researcher, I have taught WRT312 for five years and wanted to avoid making any assumptions about what the informants had to say about the course or how they described it.

As a result of this awareness and caution of my hermeneutic bias, interview protocols were carefully constructed and are included in Appendixes B, C, and D. These protocols included "grand tour" questions, as well as "mini-tour questions," "example questions," "experience questions," and "native-language questions" (Spradley, 1979).

The research consisted of a series of three interviews. Protocols were developed, but were directed by the following general format. The first interview (see Appendix B) established the context (Seidman, 1991) of the research participant's experience. Each participant was asked to tell as much as possible about himself or herself relative to what brought him or her to Covenant College Adult Studies Program and thus the APPL experience. For a profile of each of the participants, see Appendix E.

The second interview (see Appendix C) allowed the participants to reconstruct (Seidman, 1991) the details of their experience within the established context of , Critical Analysis and Research Writing. Questions were carefully constructed and asked in order to discover what the participants actually did in the course, not what they thought or felt about the course. In particular, each participant was asked about his or her relationships with the other students and the instructor.

The third and final interview (see Appendix D) encouraged the informants to reflect (Seidman, 1991) on the meaning of their experience in the APPL course. Here, questions about opinions and feelings were asked. For instance, some questions that were asked included: “Given what you have said about your life before you became an adult college student and given what you have said about your experience in , how do you understand that experience now? What sense do you make of it? Given what you have reconstructed in these interviews, where do you see yourself going in the future?”

All eighteen interviews were conducted between May 14, 2002 and August 21, 2002, which was five months after the participants had all taken the assessment course. With the exception of one informant, who was interviewed in her home, all the other interviews took place in either an office or classroom of one of the two regional sites. The first two interviews for each informant generally lasted 90 minutes. The third ones were usually shorter, lasting only about 45 minutes for each informant. All the interviews were audio taped, and those tapes were transcribed by a professional transcriber, resulting in about 500 pages of data. Four out of the six informants also granted permission for the researcher to read their life learning papers.

Another source of data is the curriculum and faculty guidelines. In subsequent chapters these two documents will be referred to as only the “curriculum.” First written in 1998, this version was revised first in 1999 and more recently in 2002. The authors were the coordinator of Prior Learning Assessment at Covenant College and the researcher.

Analysis of the Data

A combination of the guidelines suggested by both Seidman (1991) and Strauss (1987) was used to analyze the data collected from the 18 interviews. In both Seidman's in-depth or phenomenological interviewing analysis and Strauss's modified grounded theory analysis, they recommend that the researcher begins collecting data before any hypotheses or problems have been formulated, other than the general ones. In this way, the researcher stays very close to the data and the hypotheses, problems, and questions come out of that phenomenon or data. Eventually, profiles (Seidman, 1991) or axils (Strauss, 1987) emerge from the evidence. These categories are further defined or refined until a full, dense phenomenological or modified grounded theory is written. In this study the latter was the intention and the result.

The data analysis began September 2002 by reading the transcripts and identifying very rudimentary categories such as "conditions," "consequences," "interactions," and "strategies or tasks" (Strauss, 1987). This first read-through was an attempt to get a sense of each informant's experience and to start answering basic questions about the nature of that experience. Those questions included the following:

- What were the conditions? What were consistent parts or elements of the Module Two experience?
- What were the common consequences or results of the experience?
- Who were the players and how did they interact with each other?

- What were the typical strategies or tasks that were constructed or played out during the experience?

Countless readings of transcripts, analysis memos, textual or thematic memos, and collaborative memos or discussions were exchanged between the researcher and her advisor between September 2002 and June 2003. QSR NVIVO, qualitative software, was also used in the data analysis.

The first attempt to make sense of the data was a series of theoretical memos (Strauss, 1987). Two memos or rudimentary analytical papers were written for four of the six participants. The first memo attempted to trace the life history of the participant and his or her explanation for coming to Covenant College. The second memo was an attempt to describe the participant's experience in Module Two.

This approach was aborted at the suggestion of the researcher's advisor, as it resulted in too many abstractions and speculations too early the data analysis. In short, these memos moved away from the data too soon and failed to remain grounded in the data.

Eventually through continuous "axial coding" (Strauss, 1987) or characterizing, either manually or electronically, categories began to emerge. These categories tended to describe chronologically the participants' experience in the module. To clarify and define these categories a series of 42 analysis memos were written. These memos compiled each of the participants' responses to each of the following events or activities that were identified from the data:

- First night
- Writing process alone

- Writing process and Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning
- Library and computer or online research
- Peer review
- Conference and instructor
- Postmortem (reflective thoughts on module)

These analysis memos proved to be very helpful in staying close to or grounded in the data. They also proved helpful in filtering out textual themes or patterns in the data. From the analysis memos a textual theme matrix was developed to help identify similarities in the participants' descriptions of each of the seven categories. As a result of the memos and the matrix, the categories or axes were eventually clearly defined, reduced in number, and became the patterns or themes that are used in the following findings chapter.

Chapter Four

Findings

The purpose of this study was to describe the nature of the students' experience in their second course or module of their adult studies program. The five phases that have been identified as part of this experience will be discussed. Each phase represents several different characterizations or traits of the experience as described by the learners. These include emotional or affective responses, behaviors, or issues associated with the Assessment of Private Learning. Further explanation or understanding of each phase and its place in the overall experience is reserved for Chapter Five.

This chapter first presents the five phases or themes or sets of activities of the participants' experience of writing Life Learning Papers. They include the following: 1) Moving into Module Two; 2) Accommodating the writer's self-identity; 3) Connecting the particular with the general; 4) Sharing stories; 5) Receiving trusted feedback. The last part of the chapter presents the participants' reflections, interpretations, or meaning of this experience. This theme is called "Looking back at the process of writing Life Learning Papers." It represents two categories of learning or change in the participants; namely, instrumental and expressive.

Moving into Module Two

On the sixth week of their program, the students begin their second course or module, Critical Analysis and Research Writing. According to the curriculum, that night they are expected to come with their first critical synthesis paper (CSP), which as previously noted, represents 60 percent of their grade for the first course, Adult

Development and Life Planning. They are also expected to have read the first week's materials for Module Two and to have completed the "applications" or written exercises that accompany the reading. The applications actually are designed to guide the students through the writing of their first CSP. They stand for a typical writing process of six steps. The Module One instructor also plays a critical role by relaying these expectations to the students in a timely and accurate manner and by giving his or her own clear directions or expectations for the first critical synthesis paper.

The goal for the first night of Module Two, according to the curriculum, is to review the six-step writing process and thus the students' critical synthesis papers. At the same time their second writing assignment, the life learning paper, is introduced. In preparation for this assignment, both the admissions specialist and the academic advisor have talked with each student about possible life experiences suitable for the Assessment of Private Learning (APL) or the writing module.

Some students come into the program with enough credits to fulfill their academic requirements without APL. Nevertheless, the talks between the students and the academic advisor help them work out tentative academic profiles for the completion of their bachelor's degrees. Then before the start of Module Two, the academic advisor assembles for each student a packet that includes his or her tentative academic profile with several possible topic guidelines for their LLPs attached. The guidelines for each topic have been developed by the appropriate academic discipline and indicate the minimum requirements to earn both a specific number and certain level (i.e., lower or upper) of credits. Sometimes the academic

advisor comes on the first night of Module Two to review this material with the students. Other times he or she gives it to the instructor to explain to the students how these guidelines fit into the process of writing their life learning papers.

Another objective for that evening, according to the curriculum, is to introduce the procedure and privacy issue of sharing and reviewing each other's papers, not only the CSPs, but also the LLPs. The latter usually contain much more personal information than the former, thus some students may be reluctant to have any one else read them, except instructors or trained evaluators for the Assessment of Private Learning or English waivers.

So even through the first night's schedule appears to be well planned, any trip into an unknown territory can set off a sense of nervousness or fear in people, and with the participants of this study, there was no exception. Moving into Module Two, they reported strong feelings of either anxiety or confusion. Those feelings seemed related mostly to their first paper (i.e., critical synthesis paper) that they had written in the week between the end of Module One and the start of Module Two. According to the participants, both the first instructor and the students had met the expectations of the curriculum (i.e., clear directions had been given and the course materials had been read).

Feeling Anxious

The participants' recollections of their feelings on the first night of Module Two were dominated by anxiety, nervousness, worry, and insecurity. Ariel recalled that when she first came into the class, she remembered thinking that she had done well on papers at a regional public university. But she "really didn't have a direction

... in the thought process. ... So I probably just kind of by accident or by luck or maybe the instructor wasn't even paying that much attention or giving me that much feedback ...," Ariel explained. "So that probably led me to, well, I must be doing something okay, but I don't really know what it is."

Furthermore, because Ariel had received a poor evaluation of her sample paper, which is part of the admission process, she was particularly worried about her first CSP. "When I wrote ... a sample writing ... and my feedback on it was 'you're [probably] going to need ... tutoring' and ... 'you're writing is really bad' and all this stuff. And at that time I remember being really hurt over it and saying, oh, my goodness, I didn't know that I was that terrible because I had been writing papers at [the regional public university] and had been getting As and Bs. So I thought ... part of me was like I didn't believe them and I didn't buy into it. But another part of me was like, oh, goodness, what about that tutoring on top of all of this, and I'm really way out there ...," Ariel said.

Ariel was not alone in her feelings of being mostly lucky and completely at a loss with her writing and achieving good grades on her papers at previous colleges and universities that she had attended. About her first CSP, Faith said, "I have not a clue what I was doing with that paper. I was really lost with that paper." Although the Module One instructor had given the class members an outline of what she wanted and what she expected, according to Faith, it was not enough to make her feel secure in her writing ability. "I didn't know about how to go out and then in [i.e., introduction] and then do your body and then go from a narrow to a larger [i.e., conclusion] at the end of the paper," Faith explained. "Even though I did okay on

that paper. . . I didn't have that confidence. I think I felt lucky that I did it that way. It just happened for me."

The discussion about the writing process that first night apparently had little or no effect on Faith's feelings about or confidence in her writing ability. "I don't believe . . . that first night was that stressful. But by the time we left, I was like I have no idea what I'm doing," Faith said. "That was probably what I thought when I left, oh, brother, I have no idea what I'm doing, oh, well."

Jan also commented about the first night of Module Two that she was "nervous about writing another paper and [having] a new instructor." Cheri was another participant who "remembered being nervous [the first night] because all of a sudden it's an English class." "I was still nervous just from writing the first paper. It wasn't turned in yet, so I was still unsure of myself," explained Cheri.

In sum, despite curricular and instructor support, some students moved from Module One into Module Two with marked anxiety, nervousness, worry, and insecurity as to whether they could meet the writing expectations or standards of the college.

Being Confused

While some participants appeared anxious and insecure about the writing assignments as they moved from Module One into Module Two, others seemed unconcerned and confident about their writing ability. Yet they were confused about the transition between the two modules in various ways.

Although Bobbi entered Module Two with no anxiety or concern about her writing ability, she did expect to become a better writer along the way. She expected

“ . . . to find out things that in [her] writing and in [her] paper that . . . maybe [she was] not doing a good job in the structure of it as far as paragraph or sentence structure.” Bobbi apparently missed the point about the distinction between the critical synthesis papers and the life learning papers. “Yeah, I didn’t know that until you [i.e., researcher] were telling me now because I was thinking why did I, you know, have that whole module, that whole class, when I mean it made me less confident in my writing,” she said. Bobbi believed that she had no need for credits for prior learning. Yet, she said that she chose her topic (i.e., alcoholism) as a way to research and prepare for a national assessment test, which , according to the curriculum, she could have avoided by submitting her paper for assessment of prior learning.

Like Bobbi, John embarked upon his journey through Module Two with confidence in his writing ability. Yet he was also somewhat confused about the first night. First, he remembered submitting his CSP that night. “The [CSP was] another one of those areas where . . . there was confusion about what had to be done and what didn’t and when to do and who gets which copies, and there was one of those moments, if I recall correctly,” John said, seeming to speak for his entire group. “The part that [seemed] goofy about that [was] you’re checking it (i.e., CSP) for certain things, although you’re not using the format (i.e., LLP) that you’re going to be using.” In other words, most of his confusion seemed to focus on the difference in structure between the critical synthesis papers and the life learning papers. Whereas the latter are organized around Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning, the former have a traditional essay format.

John described his feelings that first night as “reasonably overwhelmed.” “I think everybody’s heads were reeling. I mean we had just turned in our first paper, so that was already traumatic enough, and then you’re starting this whole other boring concept (i.e., LLP). It could have been a module on anything and probably [would have] had almost the same impact. I think it’s so early on that almost everything is new and different, so whether it was that [life learning paper] or . . . statistics, I think, would have been equally traumatic probably,” John said, again seeming to speak for his cohort.

There is also some evidence of confusion about the role of the academic advisor, the individual academic plan, and the topic guidelines for each of the life learning papers. John was the only one who remembered meeting with the academic advisor, as part of the registration process, and discussing possible life learning paper topics. According to John, that conversation occurred about six weeks before the start of Module Two. “[The academic advisor] gave us some [ideas] that she had. I don’t even remember, but . . . I remember her writing where, you know, day one, way back when you registered, she wrote down some of the ideas on things that you could write about [based on how many and what kind of credits you needed to complete your degree]. So, yeah, we got . . . those [topic guidelines] from her because that’s where some of those ideas came from.” However, John made no mention of receiving his academic profile with those topic guidelines or whether the academic advisor came in person.

Faith did remember that the instructor, not the academic advisor, passed out the topic guidelines. But when she received them, she was uncertain. She had

brought her topic guidelines [marriage and family] to the research interview, along with about 10 pages out of about 140 pages from her Module Two curriculum. “So that’s everything that I tore out [or kept] that I said, ‘Okay, I have to have these with me when I’m writing the paper. We’ve got to find out what is important for us, don’t we? But most importantly [those pages and that topic guidelines sheet] kind of gave [me] the key, the point,” Faith explained. Although she could produce the topic guidelines and those selected pages from the module materials, Faith, like John, appeared to have no academic profile from the advisor.

Cheri was the only participant to mention her academic profile and that it had been helpful in choosing the topic for her life learning paper (i.e., spiritual growth and development). She also mentioned that she had “met [the academic advisor] a few times.” Ariel and Jan never directly referred to the academic advisor.

In sum, all the participants moved into Module Two with feelings of either anxiety or confusion about the two writing assignments for the first two modules. They also experienced some confusion about the connection between academic advising and the academic profiles and topic guidelines for the LLPs. Their issue was whether their writing was good enough to make the grade, not only in the first module, but also in the second, and stay in the game.

Accommodating Writer’s Self-Identity

As will be seen, one of the features of this study is the participants’ emotional reaction to Module Two’s introduction of a distinctive way of organizing an academic writing assignment. In order to fully describe this reaction, it is helpful to show first the feelings and assumptions about writing that they brought to the module (i.e., their

initial writer's identity). Then it will be shown how this identity was impacted by the introduction of Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning as the structure for the life learning papers. The description of the participants' negotiation between their initial identity as writers and their final mastery of Kolb's Model into their writing process is the theme of this phase of the study and will be referred to as accommodating the writer's self-identity.

Already anxious, insecure, or confused as they move into Module Two, the learners were quickly confronted with another challenge; that is, incorporating an unusual way of thinking about and writing a paper. This rare format is introduced to the learners on the second night, according to the curriculum. Actually, during the first week of Module Two, they are expected to read about it in the course materials, as they complete the final draft of their critical synthesis paper and start work on the thesis statement for their life learning paper. During the second night of class, according to the curriculum, Kolb's Model was reviewed and also the Learning Styles Inventory, which is based on the model. All the students have taken this inventory at the start of their program.

The model was then presented as a way of structuring the life learning papers. Many different visuals such as a graph, outline, descriptors, and a sample paper were used to help the students understand that the model was intended more as the structure of the life learning paper than a writing method. An in-class application called "Once around the Circle" was also done to show the students how the modes of model (i.e., concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract concept, and active experimentation) are differentiated not only in function, but also in language. Yet as

will be shown in the following description of their encounter with this foreign approach to organizing a paper, most of the study's participants experience stress and frustration as they accommodate the mastery of Kolb's Model into their initial identity as writers.

Initial identity as writers

As noted above, the feelings and assumptions about writing that the learners brought to the module defines "initial identity as writers." The process of starting and writing a thesis statement stressed and frustrated some of the participants. For example, the following is Faith's vivid description of her "mental process" of trying to develop a thesis statement.

First, I had to pick out what I was going to talk about, the small words-- religion, finances, and trust and communication. Those were my key words. But then, taking those key words and putting them in [a thesis statement], I had to have a lot of help from [the instructor]. And getting them in a format that . . . went in the angle of what the paper wanted from a sociological viewpoint, I had a difficult time with the wording. . . . So I . . . got so frustrated with the thesis statement and having such a hard time with it, it just made everything hard. It was a very hard paper to write. I mean, you could see how frustrated—there is pencil, there is black ink, there is blue ink, and there is red ink. That is how many times I had to go over this [guidelines sheet] in my mind and relook at this thing to try and figure out what I was doing.

She had brought her topic guidelines sheet to the research interview. Faith also recalled that the instructor had directed the students "to have [the thesis statement] turned in and checked by the [academic advisor] by Week Three (this procedure deviated from the course curriculum). . . . It took me forever, and I kept [going] to [the academic advisor] because I didn't know what I was doing."

Yet her academic advisor apparently mislead her about the sociological perspective of her paper, and thus when she finally did meet with the instructor, Faith

had to start over. “Well, [the academic advisor] first told me that I could do what I thought I was going to do, and then I had . . . [the entire first cycle at] . . . the first meeting [that] I had with [the instructor]. I had my whole thesis statement done up, the first paragraph, introduction paragraph, and then I found out I was doing it wrong,” Faith said.

Faith remembered the instructor had talked “a lot” about “prewriting,” a term used in the course curriculum, and its various techniques such as free writing, outlining, or self-interviewing that can be used to develop a tentative thesis statement for any writing assignment. But she confessed that she did not “remember anything he said about [it] because [her] prewriting [was] done in [her] head. . . . I prewrite in my head. I don’t prewrite out on paper. But he said prewriting can be in your head, a lot of people do that. Not everybody has to write things down on paper the first time because some people . . . go over it at different times and different places and go, oh, yeah, okay, that’s—then. I do this all the time. I’m like, oh, that’s something, yeah, and I want to put that in my paper. I do a lot of prewriting in my head. And then when I’m writing, I go and sit down . . . and type it out. . . . But when I sit down and type, what I’m typing is . . . just like my final copy. I’ve vested a lot [of time], I mean, I’m thinking of each and everything . . . oh, it was hard. Maybe it’s just my style. My style didn’t help any.” This was evident in the fact that she wrote very little for the first four weeks of the course.

Like Faith, Bobbi’s writing style seemed to be very little help to her. She described working on her computer at home as “very frustrating . . .” Unlike Faith, however, Bobbi appeared to have little recognition of the term “prewriting.” She

never did or could explain her method for developing a thesis statement. The closest she came to an explanation was to say that with her first CSP and other previous papers, they had “[flowed] really good when I [was] writing. . . . I was just writing. I mean I just [would] write what’s coming into my head. But [the LLP] just couldn’t flow for me; writing it was very difficult [I] had to stop and place it somewhere. . . . I just didn’t feel like I had the instruction . . . to put [my experiences] in the sections. I mean I was basically trying to look at the different models (e.g., an oversimplified, bulleted sample of once-around-the-circle using Kolb’s Model) and go, okay, I guess this is where this goes,” she said.

When pressed about methods of prewriting, Bobbi did recall that the instructor had said something about “brainstorming.” But she could not remember “ever being told that [they] . . . could just write [the paper] and then put it in Kolb’s [Model].”

In contrast to Faith and Bobbi, Jan, Ariel, and Cheri had much less trouble accommodating their initial writing style to the unusual challenges of the life learning paper. Jan, in particular, had so little trouble with writing her life learning paper, she seemed almost indifferent. To her, it was just another writing assignment “that . . . was real structural. . . . I can’t, I mean, you could put a gun to my head right now, and I couldn’t tell you, but at the time I knew what [the instructor] expected, and I had to write about the three [learning outcomes] and what I had to write about, you know, you title it out,” she said, apparently referring to APA style and the different levels of headings that are used in the paper’s organization.

Ariel also had little trouble writing her life learning paper. In contrast to Jan, she was much more enthusiastic about writing. “I love sitting down and doing that.

It's enjoyable to me. The hard part, for me, is getting myself settled down to say, 'OK, go do it.' But once I get there, I don't want to stop . . .," she said.

Ariel's prewriting method was once again more mental than what is suggested in the course for the writing process. "I [would have] thought about [the paper] in my head for days and days before [I sit down at the computer], just kind of throwing ideas around, probably brainstorming in my head; [then when I sit down at the computer,] that's when everything starts flowing for me. . . . And then [I] make . . . changes throughout as I am going along. . . . I might see something that I need to put somewhere else, so I move it there or whatever."

Cheri admitted that time was a factor that pushed her into attempting to structure her LLP into Kolb's Model as soon as possible. Although her cohort had extra weeks because of Christmas break, as a youth pastor it made no difference in her writing process. "Most of the time the paper [was] half written in my head before I [would] even get to the computer. So I usually [would] hardly go to actually writing until I [would have] it formulated in my head first."

So Cheri's prewriting method was much like everyone else's in the study. However, Cheri did recall the Module Two instructor encouraging the students to prewrite by "just telling their stories and not worrying about the structure of the paper. . . . And I used [the instructor's suggestion] to some extent, but even as I was writing, it was like wait a minute, [and] I'd put a parenthesis around a paragraph or something and I'd write 'CE' (i.e., concrete experience) next to it or something. So I was aware of [the model] while I was writing that way; that [sentence or something] needs to go there."

John also had trouble with the format of the life learning papers. Yet he was more inclined to believe that he was instructed to write or prewrite the papers in Kolb's Model. When asked what he remembered about his writing process for his LLP, John responded with a question of his own, "You mean me actually writing it or the way it was taught and how [I] went about writing it after that?" Told that either response would be all right, John said, "I don't know. I mean it just wasn't the easiest thing to do to learn to write in a different format, and I remember a lot of writing and I'm just not sure I'm hitting it and I know there were parts that I put in the wrong places."

As with all the other participants, John appeared to have made the connection that the LLPs had to be written from the start in the Kolb's Model format. "Oh, yeah, sure, sure. I grasp it better now, yeah. I don't know if it was clear as mud at the time; it seems better to me now," he said. "[The connection was made] because [the instructor] said you had to write your papers using Kolb's Model. I mean, it has four parts to it, and you talk about an experience, you reflect on it, you sort of postulate a theory, I guess, as far as abstract concepts, and then talk about how you implement them. [The instructor] said that is the [experiential] learning process and that is the model by which you will write your paper. Because if there was a way to do it without Kolb's Model, I think we would have all been interested. But unless we were missing something, it was quite obvious that was the way you [were] to write [those] papers and I continue to write these papers."

In sum, none of the participants, except perhaps Cheri, attempted to follow the recommended writing process (i.e., prewriting techniques) as they were presented

in the first night of class. They all tended to rely on their own writing method or style, which had been successful until they encountered the foreign construction or framework for writing called “Kolb’s Model.” Then if they were able to accommodate a new writer’s identity fairly quickly by incorporating the model’s modes into their prewriting, they suffered less stress and frustration. Examples of this successful accommodation were Ariel, Jan, and Cheri. Those who were less successful were Faith, Bobbi, and John. They experienced a great deal of stress and frustration as demonstrated in the next section.

Encounter with a foreign construction for learning to write

As noted above, the participants’ negotiation between their initial identity as writers and their final mastery of Kolb’s Model into their writing process defines the “encounter with a foreign construction for learning how to write.” Without exception their struggle with the LLP’s format appears to be the most memorable and thus defining element of the course. For instance, Ariel said that the class “studied and learned about . . . people’s different learning styles and how the dynamics of that can work or works [in] people’s relationships.” Then she added that “Kolb’s Model . . . made it a lot easier to write a paper.” She seemed to have missed the connection between the Learning Styles Inventory and the theory upon which it is based; namely, Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning. Yet, she appeared to have made a connection between the model and the writing of life learning papers as defined at Covenant College.

Furthermore, Ariel saw the LLP as “a great opportunity to prove not only to [herself], but [also] to others . . . that [she had] gained some knowledge and learning

[from her own experiences.] . . . [the paper] wasn't someone else's [work], [and it was worthy of college credit]," she concluded. "I really [liked] that because I do believe that . . . there is so much that you can learn that you can apply to different things, but not given credit for that. . . . You always have to look at someone else's experience, someone else's work, or somebody else's theories or ideas. [The life learning paper] kind of gives you a chance to find your own [ideas]. It was a nice feeling."

Whereas Ariel felt good about her encounter with the model, Bobbi felt otherwise. "I have a lot to say about Module Two. When you came in [to talk about the study], it was like I didn't care for it. I felt like I was very confident, a very good writer, and . . . I had been doing classes at the community college, had done classes at [regional public university]. I had always gotten A+s, As, great grades on my papers, and I struggled with that type of writing. It was awful," said Bobbi. "It was just awful. I didn't like it at all. I mean it made me less confident in my writing from that class, and I'm not sure of the benefit of it." This lack of confidence, however, seemed to be correlated to her less than expected grade of "B." Whether she would have felt differently about her writing and the module if she had received an "A," without first questioning the instructor's calculations, was a question that was not asked during the interviews. Nevertheless, the evidence does seem to show that Bobbi had a great deal of difficulty accommodating Kolb's Model into her writing style, and moreover she confused the LLPs' unique structure with that of the CSPs, which resulted in further confusion for her in the following module and beyond. Like John, Bobbi believed that she "had to write" her LLP (and subsequent CSPs) in

Kolb's Model. "I was trying to write in that Kolb's. Yeah, I'm using the examples, and I'm trying to put it in the sections, and I was getting so frustrated because I wasn't just writing," she said.

Faith was another example of a participant who thought of Kolb's Model as a model for learning how to write, instead of its intended purpose as a model for how adults learn from experience. She was even more vocal than Bobbi about her complaints. "I did not like it at all," said Faith, referring to Kolb's Model and shuffling through her pages that she had brought to the interview. "Oh, here we are. Here's where these nasty little things are. The introduction, which was fairly easy, but then we had to do the content (sic) experience, the reflective observation, abstract concepts, and the active experimentation, which were so confusing. . . . And no matter how many times I read this [sample paper] . . . when [I would] go to . . . physically write down what [I was] thinking, it [was] very hard to do. . . ." Faith was unable to remember whether Kolb's Model was introduced early or later in the module. She continued to look through her papers and said, "Okay, here's Kolb's Model, right here—I pulled it out and carried it with me. And that was—I have a paper on it. Yeah, I tore it out. I didn't write a date on it. . . ."

Of the four modes of Kolb's Model, Faith seemed to have the most trouble understanding "reflective observation." "I couldn't tell you [what it means according to Kolb]. I [would] have to read it, and I [would] have to read it, and I [would] have to read it. Reflective observation is supposed to be reflecting back on your experience. Okay, I can say that much, but that don't mean nothing to me," said Faith.

Like Faith, John had some difficulty with the “reflective observation” part of the model. Unlike Faith, however, John was able to move through his initial frustration and accommodate a new way of thinking and writing much more quickly than Faith. Using Kolb’s Model, he modified his writing process and described how he methodically learned to reflect in each of his experiences:

Well, I guess, reflective observation is certainly first person, and the concrete experience is what you did. But even reflective observation, I think, it’s a whole warm, fuzzy section I dread. I hate it. I hate it. As a matter of fact, I had written a concrete experience, and I . . . just stopped because I said, oh, here’s that, and I didn’t even know where to go then. So I said, all right. I typically try to write three paragraphs for each section, and it spaces out about right, so it’s a page, page plus. So I look back, concrete experience, what’s my first paragraph say? Okay, what does that mean to me, what did I see in that first paragraph? Try to write another paragraph [of] reflective observation. And that’s just the way I have to approach it, methodically.

Faith noted that her instructor had given the class a “cheat sheet” of words to help them distinguish the different parts of Kolb’s Model. “Yeah, he did say we had little—on my little purple area (pointing to another one of her hand-written notations)—there are words that you’re supposed to use to [write each part of Kolb’s Model] . . . I’ve got my words,” Faith said. For instance, for reflective observation, the list of words included such phrases as “looking back,” “in retrospect,” and “upon reflection.”

Faith also remembered that doing the “Once around the Circle” application in class had been helpful. “Yeah, we talked about Kolb’s Model and had gotten in a little bit of that funny [circle]. I understood that part! I thought this [Kolb’s Model] was going to be a breeze [and] that it was going to be easy because I was looking at this [once-around-the-circle sample upon which Bobbi also greatly depended] . . . it looks so simple,” she said. “When we did . . . once around the circle, [the instructor]

had each of us . . . write something small, and then we took a couple of them and put them on the board and talked about them and said, ‘Okay, that really doesn’t belong there,’” she said.

As noted Cheri also referred to Kolb’s Model as “frustrating,” but far less so than Bobbi or Faith or John. “As a matter of fact the more it was pounded in my head, the more I actually got it,” Cheri said. “It wasn’t something that I picked up [and said], okay, I’ve read it; I’ve seen it, and I picked it up. It took time. I had to work with it.” As with so many of the other participants, she had the most “difficulty trying to get everything into the boxes.” For her, “just everything runs together.” Yet Cheri was able to incorporate the model “pretty quickly” into her writing process. “[As I] was . . . writing and knew that I was writing under this [block] . . . I went back and read it. I was like wait a minute, let’s move this to that,” she explained.

Her ability to hear and differentiate the modes of Kolb’s Model came throughout the writing of her life learning paper, according to Cheri. For instance, although she needed a little prompting to remember doing the “Once around the Circle” application in class, Cheri found that exercise helpful in understanding how the model was used as the structure of the LLP. On the other hand, Cheri admitted that she had “trouble [with not only the structure, but also with the content,] figuring out how much of [herself] to share . . . [because she did not] always like sharing [her] past [incarceration].”

John never called the model frustrating. He did, however, refer to it as “boring.” “To me, you just have to take out all the personality That’s the way, you know, [the instructor] was looking for it because he is teaching the module and

that's what I've done and I've done well. So that, to me, says that's what they're looking for. . . . To me that's what is different [about the life learning papers] . . . I compartmentalize these parts. Yeah, they all flow together, and they are all part of a paper, but I very much have to compartmentalize them to do this kind of stuff. I think it's . . . just an unnatural way to present the information. I add in like useless tidbits or phrases that I can't put them in there. I have had to take out all the really goofy stuff that, to me, is what gives a paper personality. . . .”

Jan also felt that the structure of the life learning paper obstructed her voice or style. Compared to the other five participants, Jan had few clear memories of the model or the LLP assignment. Yet, she recalled the sample paper. Jan believed that the writer had not expressed her honest feelings, and she also at times had been held back by the instructor from expressing her true humor. “Yeah, yeah, because I think . . . like I would put in . . . a little bit of slang and [the instructor] would say, ‘Don’t use that.’ But that’s the way that I was feeling at the time, you know, just kind of kidding, humor stuff in it. And, of course, he doesn’t know me—he didn’t know me that well either. That’s just me. I just try to see the lighter side of things. It’s much better to laugh than cry, you know, even if it’s in these little papers,” she said.

Yet she described Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning as “just a very formatted style of writing” and admitted that “. . . it kind of helped [her as] a novice at writing. . . . I knew what [the instructor] wanted, and I just filled in the blanks of it.” Her approach to writing her LLP sounded remarkably like John’s. Like John, who proposed that “concrete experience” and reflective observation” should be combined, Jan also stated that two of the sections could be combined, but she was

uncertain which two. “Yeah . . . your concrete experience and your abstract, I think, it was. I didn’t really care for it. I think it was the active experimentation. Mm, hmm. Wait a minute. What’s the one before it? Abstract concept? Reflective observation? I think that and the active experimentation could have been combined more,” Jan said.

John, however, was quite clear about which sections he would combine or rather which section he would eliminate in what he called “John’s Model”; namely, reflective observation. “To me, that’s the way the story flows, whatever the example is,” John stated. “That’s the whole major thinking versus feeling [issue]. . . . Those feelings are irrelevant to me. It’s what is behind them and why you had them that are relevant. I realize that we all have emotions and that’s fine, but that’s just how I think. I don’t care if [I] had a chance to think back, and I was sad or whatever. It’s the Dr. Laura strategy; the feelings don’t matter. I don’t mean that in a cold way. I have [feelings] as much as the next guy, but it isn’t . . .”

Pressed by the point that writing itself was a reflective process, John said, “Sure, anytime you are writing something down, you’re thinking about it. It’s just the way in which we have to present it, to me, seems contrary to the way that I would do it . . . because I know a lot of [the instructor’s] comments, when we did go over my paper, were just things that I was saying in the wrong part of the paper. I did more cutting and pasting than I had ever done [before on any other paper].”

In contrast to all the other participants, Ariel was the only one who actually found Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning helpful in her writing process. “I remember there were three or four different categories. I can’t say as if I could recite

them all right now. I do remember I liked it because it gave [me] a format to follow, and [I] knew what direction [I was] going with [my] paper and [my] writing,” Ariel said. “I saw some people struggling with [the model] in class, and I didn’t feel I had a whole lot of struggle with [it]. I think maybe part of it was because, in a way, that was how I always approached things in my life and thought of [them]. I have always [gone] to books and such to get research and to learn about things and issues that came up. Then I always [thought] through the thing, OK, there is something here I’m supposed to learn, lessons of life or whatever, so I need to pay attention while I’m going through it and get those [lessons], and in the end I’ll know what they are. Sometimes I realize I’m not going to know until it’s all done and said, and I can look [back] through the whole thing. So those lessons are something I will naturally be able to apply.”

When asked to clarify how Kolb’s Model made it easier to write a paper, especially when most students found that it only frustrated their writing process, Ariel explained, “Because, for me, . . . it was a pattern and it was kind of handed to you to follow and so it helps you to . . . put your thoughts . . . where [they] belong in this pattern, and so everything kind of fits together like a puzzle. [Kolb’s Model is the] pattern [or] the puzzle without the pieces and then [you are] able to put [the pieces of your life experiences] in where they belong. . . . If I were to write a paper without the Kolb’s Model, I would have been totally lost. It would have been like chaos in my mind, I guess, because I . . . wouldn’t have had that pattern. I wouldn’t have known where to start, how to put it together, you know, how to have a beginning and an end, [and a] middle.”

In sum, most participants were unable to accommodate quickly a writing method or style that incorporated the Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning into the structure of her life learning paper. They experienced various levels of stress or frustration, with the focus on the issue of how to accommodate a foreign model for learning to write into their initial writer's identity.

In the end they were all able to master the model well enough to write about their life experiences and to organize them according to this unusual construction. This mastery came, as Cheri pointed out, with time and effort at home or wherever the students happened to be working on their papers. But it also came as the students interacted together in the classroom or individually with the instructor.

Connecting the Particular to the General

The participants reported that their least favorite or helpful phase of the course was "library night." According to the curriculum, either a local community college library or an in-class presentation about online research techniques should be scheduled for the third week. Improving the learners' research skills is one objective for this night. But the goal for them is to begin finding scholarly literature that will connect or support their particular, personal "concrete experiences" to the general, public, or "abstract concepts" or principles represented in their personal experiences. For instance, John, who was the only participant to write about his professional experience, stated in his thesis statement that from 15 years of sales experience, he had learned to be successful by communicating with honesty and integrity. Then after demonstrating that he did indeed have those traits (concrete experience) and explaining what they meant to him (reflective observation), John again stated his

learning outcome or principle of a successful salesperson; that is, honest, reliable communication is necessary for a successful sales career (abstract concept). At that point, John or any other student who is writing a life learning paper, shifts gears and no longer speaks from his or her own personal experience. In this mode, the students write as they would almost any other academic writing assignment. They define their terms, explain why the information is important, and then state how the principle might be practiced by anyone. Here the students rely on appropriate, credible research to answer and support their responses to these questions. Then in the last mode (active experimentation) of the “circle,” they return to their personal experience and state how they have applied the abstract concept both directly and indirectly. For instance, John talked about how, despite temptations in a competitive sales field, he continued to hold the standards of honesty and integrity in his communication not only in his workplace, but also in his home. John went through all four of these modes or sections of the “circle” for each of the three aspects or learning outcomes of his thesis statement.

Some peer review of the students’ first “circle” is also part of that night’s agenda, according to the curriculum. Yet, only Cheri had a vague recollection of some sharing that occurred at the library. “There was a couple of times that we did it—for my life learning paper? When we did the actual . . . [library research], on the very end . . . I believe it was just three of us sitting next to each other,” she said.

Although much less scholarly literature is required for these unusual research papers, compared to traditional ones, according to the curriculum, it still plays a crucial role in supporting the student’s case that he or she does indeed have the prior

knowledge and skill in an academic field or discipline to earn college credits. It also grounds the learners' experience in a particular discourse or discipline such as sociology or psychology. Yet of the two groups represented by the study's participants, only one group seemed to have gone to a local community college. The other group members remembered receiving some kind of hand out that the instructor provided on keyword research. Thus this discussion will be divided into two categories—curriculum-driven and self-directed research.

Curriculum-driven research

As noted above, according to the curriculum, either a local community college library or an in-class presentation about online research techniques should be scheduled for the third week. This is the definition of “curriculum-driven research.” Of the three participants who went to the library, Bobbi expressed the typical response to whether her library or online research skills improved as a result of the course, “No, the library stuff I had there, I had already had at the [regional public university], so, I mean, it was duplicating that for me.” She added that her research was on “alcoholism and codependency” and it had been “well done.”

Cheri went so far as to say that this part of the course was the least helpful aspect. “I’ve already got decent computer skills,” she said. “I yell at the computer a lot, but I have decent computer skills.” She added that she remembered the instructor had given a presentation on library research techniques “for over an hour or at least an hour” that night and that because the community college library closed at 9 p.m., the class was there for only three hours. She also remembered that after the presentation, “the first computer [that she had] sat down at . . . didn’t work. . . . So I

moved back to another one. I ended up sitting all by myself, and I remember I couldn't get into a web site that I really wanted to get into. And I didn't really find anything that I was looking for, but I did go ahead and . . . e-mailed [it to] myself . . ."

Ariel affirmed what Cheri had said about that night. She also reported that she had gained no confidence or skill in online research. "I don't feel that I'm real confident at the computer [research]. . . . I don't know exactly what's what on it yet because I have not had the time, especially going to this class and I was kind of thrown into it. The beginning of this class was the first time I sat down with my computer really and started using it. So I haven't been afforded a whole lot of time without interruptions to learn what my [new] computer is capable of. . . . My main objective with the computer is to type . . . my papers out," she explained.

Self-directed Research

"Self-directed research" is defined as the techniques that the learners used, other than the curriculum-driven method, to find the body of literature that connected to and supported their particular prior knowledge, as presented in their life learning papers. These methods included using their home or office libraries or going to a local public library on their own time. The evidence showed that the participants favored these methods of research.

There seemed to be two reasons for the limited use of the curriculum-driven research component of the course. One, as noted, was that only half of the participants actually went to a research library. The other half apparently only received an information sheet on keyword searches. Second, most of the participants already owned most, if not, all the resources that they referenced in their life learning

papers. For instance, because of a self-help class on personal growth that she had taken in her neighborhood, Ariel had already purchased all the books that she used as references for her LLP. "Like for my LLP, I had most of my references. I sat down at home first and went through all the books I have there, and most of my resources were there already" she said.

Cheri, John, and Jan also reported that they already had all their references in their personal libraries. "I think I bought one extra book and then didn't use it. . . . I had already taught a lesson to my teens about a year ago on prayer, and so I knew quite a bit right there. It was just finding what I wanted" Cheri said.

"My [LLP] was on sales, so I had all the books I needed. I didn't need to . . . use the online resources" John said. He also remembered receiving a hand out from the instructor on "how to find stuff. But because [he] had the books and a fear of the Internet and how that whole thing worked, [he] just worked with what [he] had and [that] was fine."

"I did it on having a child. So the fertility part at first when I was trying to get pregnant, I read every book there was" Jan said. For her second learning outcome on having a child at an older age, however, Jan said that she had not done any prior research. "No, because I never thought I could get pregnant in my second marriage, so I never researched it" she explained. For those additional references Jan recalled using a combination of modern and "old-fashioned" library research. "Some [references] I got off the Internet, but mostly I got books out of the library" she said. "And [the instructor] did go over a little bit on the Internet stuff and things like that . .

. to help you do the research part, but there wasn't anything more that [the instructor] could have done for us."

Faith, however, had no memory of library research as a class activity. "I don't remember! That's why I am so confused, I mean, I don't think we followed [the module]. I think . . . the way we had classes was pretty abstract and not [really] formatted, as far as like what we were actually supposed to be doing" she said. "That's where I was stressing, stressing, stressing!"

During the entire course Faith insisted that library research techniques were mentioned only briefly. "You know . . . just maybe 10 or 15 minutes [they were] talked about. Maybe by this level, they expect you to have some [knowledge], but I don't have any" she said. "He gave us that [hand out on key word searches] and said this [was] a real good outline and how you can go get information." Yet Faith admitted that at that time she set the piece of paper aside and never thought about it again until she was having trouble with her literature review for her independent student project (ISP).

Like Cheri, Faith thought that even a 10 minute presentation about library research was a waste of time. "I was like why are we doing all of this? Don't waste my time because we weren't doing a whole lot of research for this paper. Just one little section of each thing--you get little blurbs, you know, I've got to use the Bible for one, and I don't know what I used now. But, you know, getting a few books was easy. Getting 15 [for the independent student project] is a whole different story" she said.

Nevertheless, on her own at some point during this phase, Faith went to a library to find books as references for her LLP. “[The reference librarian didn’t help me]. I didn’t know that you could do that. I didn’t know there was somebody that would do that for you or help you do that. I got on their little computer thing that . . . you just type in the main word and the subject, and then stuff came up. Communication was one word that I used, and there was lots of stuff on that. But then I had to narrow that down to trust and communication and marriage. Yeah, I kind of used those points in my thesis statement because I couldn’t find books that were related to the topics. . . . It took me like two hours. There’s so much information” Faith explained.

Jan was the only participant to offer the theory that during this phase the library night was required only as a way to practice either their research or typing skills, not as a way to support or generalize their personal learning or positions as demonstrated in their papers. “It gives you more experience in researching. . . . I mean, you should be able to back up some of the things; . . . you’re learning more from [writing the paper] when you do research. You’re reading other people—well, see, I guess it’s what you’re doing it on,” she concluded. “Well, I guess, every paper, I get to be a faster [typist]. But, I mean, I don’t think I’m going to get to 120 words a minute. I’m probably 50 words a minute.”

In sum, this phase of the course was the least well received. At best it is apparent that most of the participants were either already confident or too consumed with the writing of their LLP to be concerned about their computer and research skills. About the best that may be said about the night is it appears not to add to their

anxiety, confusion, stress, or frustration with the writing assignment. Moreover, most of the participants had appropriate, credible references in their own personal libraries. And if they needed to find scholarly literature, as in the case of Faith or Jan, they used the “old-fashion” method of going to the local library, as opposed to going to the Internet at home.

Sharing Stories

As noted, on the first night of Module Two, according to the curriculum, the idea and practice of peer review is introduced. Then, throughout the course the students are given opportunities to share and discuss their work and more importantly their understanding of the integration of Kolb’s Model into their writing process.

The fourth night, in particular, according to the curriculum, is set aside for this activity. Divided into small groups, usually less than five, the students are instructed to read their papers out loud to each other. In this way they are encouraged to listen for the content or language in each of the model’s four modes and not focus on the technical or mechanical aspects of the writing such as grammar or punctuation errors. In both the faculty guidelines and the student materials, there are written directions and various checklists that may also be used for peer review. The checklists take the students through the outline or parts of the paper such as introduction, thesis statement, transition, or concrete experience. For each of these elements, there are questions for the students to answer. For instance, one of the questions for a concrete experience is, Are facts presented that occurred only at the time of the experience? Furthermore, the instructors may move from group to group and participate in the peer review.

Of course, while the students are focused on whether they are successfully adapting the model into their writing style, they are also sharing their personal or private life stories and the lessons that they learned from them. For instance, Ariel's life learning paper was about her three divorces. And Cheri, although some would consider her topic personal enough—spiritual growth and prayer—also talked about what sparked her closer relationship with God; namely, her military incarceration. Because these stories often reveal painful, vulnerable periods in the students' lives, they are sometimes reluctant to share them. But when they do, especially early in their program, the students often find that they have a lot in common and thus begin to build community, moving from a group of people who just happened to end up in the same room at the same time for a number of weeks to a cohort of students who care and support each other. As they start to recognize their individual differences, strengths, and weaknesses, the group begins to work together in more effective ways.

What is clear from the evidence, however, is that not every learner "trusts" or places much value on his or her peer's suggestions or remarks about his or her LLP. Thus the exercise may be somewhat affirming and confidence-building and helpful in moving their writing process along, but as far as assuring the learners that they have definitely and definitively used not only the model, but also the English language and APA style in the proper way, the only affirmation that these learners trusted came from one source, that is, the instructor. In their minds, the instructor was the only "expert" and "authority" and had the final word on what was right or wrong in their life learning papers. The following discussion is divided among these two apparent perceptions of peer review; that is, its "perceived value" and its "perceived

limitation.” Along with their perceptions, the students’ description of the peer review process will also be included.

Perceived Value of Sharing Stories

The perceived value of sharing stories was twofold: It brought the group members closer together; and it contributed slightly to their confidence as they accommodated Kolb’s Model into their writing process. Bobbi and Cheri, in particular, found peer review to be important or valuable. Bobbi, who all along had nothing good to say about the writing course and was the most confused about its purpose and value was the first to point out the perceived value of sharing stories. “Everybody who read mine was like I just don’t know what you could change. It’s really good. . . . I seemed to be one of the ones grasping [the idea] because the other ones . . . just couldn’t get it. They just couldn’t get it, and I was just giving them suggestions and things they could do. I remember doing that,” she said. “Yeah, I think, it really did [bring us together]. I think . . . just to learn more about each other . . . the personal stuff that you don’t just meet somebody and start sharing. That people writing about real sensitive things, hmm, I can’t think of it, I really . . . can’t think of the word that I want.”

But while she was trying to retrieve that word from her memory, Bobbi must have thought again about the rest of her experience in the course. “[My] least favorite class so far that I’ve had is definitely the Module Two,” she concluded.

Nevertheless, Cheri also had good memories about peer review. She found it to be very helpful, encouraging, and “comfortable,” especially after the first time. It gave her the confidence to go ahead and be more self-disclosing. “When they shared

their topics it—especially one of the women who I was more nervous [about] sharing my past with because some people, when they hear my past, they automatically . . . look down on me. And this one woman happened to be a [former] state trooper (i.e., Bobbi) . . . and so I was nervous about that, but she shared her past first. And so really that helped me and it was like, okay, you know what? I can go ahead and put myself in this paper because they heard it and they said you need more of you in there, meaning more personal. And so once I heard their reflections, and it was like I felt comfortable doing it then,” she explained.

Ariel also described her experience as affirming and building her confidence in her writing ability. “I had very positive remarks from two other students. They seemed to be really impressed with the way that I wrote. It made me feel good. For me that class was really positive. It left me feeling good about myself and confident in doing research writing,” she explained.

Perceived Limitation of Sharing Stories

Yet, more participants questioned the value of sharing stories than embraced it. Their skepticism was focused on the issue of trust and whether the students were capable of giving each other valuable feedback. They also questioned whether greater group cohesiveness had actually occurred in Module Two. For instance, Ariel said, “I don’t know if we shared enough to do that [in Module Two]. One of my thoughts or a question I have, I wonder if that helped to open the door, like you (i.e., researcher) just asked, because I don’t know. I do notice as time goes on, but that could be time or something else, people come out with more and more stuff and open up a little more. It could have come out as a result of writing our papers, but

we didn't really share them a whole lot. I can only think of one time in particular, maybe twice, we shared what we had written . . . [and] it was pretty much in the beginning of [the module] . . . so people had not gotten too far on their papers” Ariel said.

Jan felt very much the same way about peer review as Ariel. First of all, she remembered doing peer review only “a little bit when [they] were starting . . . to get [the] . . . thesis statement [for the life learning paper]. . . . But I don't really think they help all that much because people are worried more about their own paper and you're really not going to learn from [them] . . . I mean, it helps, but not a lot. . . . [They] can't take on one more thing, and [they are] not instructors or have that knowledge in writing, especially Module Two, to be able to critique. I mean, I can't take care of myself. . . . I mean, even listening, you try to . . . be helpful. But I don't feel comfortable giving people advice about . . . what their style [is] or what they're doing. I mean, some things . . . jump out at you. You have to have . . . some of the research stuff and . . . some obvious things or their thesis statement was totally [unclear].”

Like Jan, John described the experience as “difficult.” He compared it to “asking someone to check your geometry homework if you don't necessarily understand geometry yet. . . . And that was the only part that I felt was hard because I had a different understanding of [the paper] than other kids (i.e., learners) and maybe they had had [a] reasonable response back from [the instructor] that they were headed in the right direction, but I would have [written] it differently. So to me that was just my opinion at that point. I don't know that it was a [informed] opinion.”

Faith appeared to be quite distrustful and suspicious of peer review. For example, John recalled that Faith and he had read each other's papers. "I thought she was closer than [she] thought she was," John said. "I think I read hers because a person that was supposed to [read it] wasn't married. She didn't think that he was going to even grasp what she wrote, so I think it made more sense for me to look at it. I think she read mine, and it seemed like some light bulbs came on [for her], although I didn't feel like I had a great grasp [of the model], and I didn't think hers seemed off based. So I think we both felt we were headed in a good direction."

Faith, however, never mentioned this exchange. She seemed to place her confidence only in what the instructor had to say about her paper. "It's [his] job to read it. [Instructors] know what [they're] reading and [they] know if [the students] get what [they're] supposed to be getting, . . . but when it comes to your peers that are sitting at the table with you and they're working for the same grade you're working for and they're writing the same kind of paper you're writing, it also has the same content, then that's a little different because then you're thinking, you know, I don't know what I'm doing. I don't want anybody reading this. They'll look at this and go, man, is she stupid or what? Where did she come up with this?" said Faith.

In sum, some participants found comfort and encouragement in sharing their stories. It seemed to give them the confidence and courage to proceed with their accommodation of integrating Kolb's Model into their individual writing styles. Others felt that the self-disclosure brought the group members closer together, but were uncertain whether that kind of community building had begun in Module Two.

Yet there was no doubt that most participants did not trust or value peer review. Thus although none appeared to be surprised by or pressured in sharing their stories, most students did not report any increased cohesiveness in their cohorts as a result of this exchange. The issue here was one of mistrust. Faith and Jan, in particular, seemed to treat the activity more as competition than collaboration among peers.

Receiving “Trusted” Feedback

Sharing stories seemed to offer some comfort and encouragement for the learners as they mastered the unusual writing assignment in Module Two. But for most participants an encounter with a higher “authority” seemed to be necessary for them to feel relief from the anxiety, confusion, stress, and frustration that had developed from their encounter with Kolb’s Model. These meetings, formally called one-on-one conferences, according to the curriculum, occur in the fifth and sixth weeks and are scheduled in place of class time. They take between 60 and 90 minutes for each learner. Whether a conference is scheduled the second week is optional. Usually by that time the learner has a complete draft of the life learning paper (about 25 pages) and may be working with the instructor through e-mail attachments. Whether face-to-face or computer-to-computer, during this two-week period, the instructor is giving the learners feedback about revising and editing their writing assignment. The goal, according to the curriculum, is to submit the LLPs in final form to the academic advisor on academic planning night, which is officially Week 11 of the program.

Each learner may submit up to three copies of the same paper, according to the curriculum. One copy goes to the Module Two instructor and earns 2 credits. Another copy may go to the English Department for a possible English waiver. If granted, the learner would be relinquished from taking a second semester of first-year English, so that is equivalent to 3 credits. The third copy goes to the Assessment of Private Learning and may earn up to 4 credits. However, learners usually request or “petition” for 2 or 3 credits for their prior learning.

On academic planning night, according to the curriculum, the academic advisor also reviews the learners’ “unofficial” academic profiles. Together they determine how many more credits the learners need to graduate on time with their cohorts and how they could accomplish that goal. For instance, John discovered the night of his academic planning that if he wanted to graduate with his group and not take any other courses outside of the required ones, he would have to write six more life learning papers. His other options might have been to take week-end courses or national equivalency tests such as DANTE and CLEP.

That night, according to the curriculum, once the learners decide how they are going to complete their program and their academic profiles are updated and signed, these documents become “official” contracts between the learners and the college. Nevertheless, at that point the learners do not know whether their waivers or petitions will be granted. Still by then most have received positive, trusted feedback from the Module Two instructor and are finally feeling relief and affirmation about the writing of their life learning papers.

Bobbi “felt pretty good” about her conference with her instructor. “Well, yeah, she met with me right before the final paper was due, and we went over what changes needed to be made.” Like Bobbi, Cheri reported a similar experience with the instructor. Cheri had e-mailed her paper ahead of time. But it had some kind of spacing problem in the copy. Besides that technical problem, the only other feedback that Cheri received from the instructor was “. . . a couple of mechanical things [that she] had to fix . . . one or two areas where [she] had to go into more detail concerning [her] experiences. . . .”

Ariel’s report of her conference with the instructor was about the same as Bobbi’s and Cheri’s. Yet for her the meeting was a highlight of the course. “I was really looking forward to [the conference], for one thing, because I was open to the critique on my paper. It went well. I was really proud of the fact that there was not a whole lot of work that needed to be done on my paper . . . just some [little] things here and there. I found [the conference] to be very helpful. I was looking forward to that [feedback] because I wanted [the instructor] to sit down and tell me what I was doing right and wrong and give me some constructive criticism on [my paper],” she said. I looked forward to that [meeting with her] immensely because I love that kind of thing. I just soaked that up because I liked the feedback. I like to know where I stand and what I’m doing.”

Jan also felt that the most valuable part of the course was the conference with the instructor. “What really helps . . . when we had the one on one, and we wrote the third section and he critiqued everything—where we were right, where we were

wrong . . . that's what helped me out 100 percent," she explained. "It was worth my time coming in

. . . He was prepared. He had . . . the things that we had to correct and how we could change our word things different (sic).

"What really affected me more [than anything else in the course] was sitting with [the instructor] and getting the one-on-one and having him help [me] like that . . . because [I] can get comments [from other instructors] and [sometimes I] can't even read what they've written. . . . If [the instructor] is sitting there with you, it helps a lot. . . . [I] read each sentence and . . . with grammar . . . and commas . . . all of your typical stuff. You still make mistakes on that at times . . ." Jan concluded.

John also remembered that his paper "wasn't too bad . . . [and the conference] was fine. [The instructor] read [the paper] back out loud and that seemed like a good way . . . Yeah, I mean, he was like, okay, this really belongs over here. He didn't say, man, you screwed up; this doesn't go here. He was always very supportive; to the extent that the paper was all wrong, he made it seem as positive as possible. There was one [cycle] I remember all these brackets, you know, 'RO' or 'AC', and it was always in the wrong section, so I did a lot of cutting and pasting, and I did start to get a better understanding of it at that point."

And then there was Faith, who, because of a particularly stressful and frustrating start, had only part of her paper done by the time of her conference. "By Week Five (i.e., Week Ten of the program) . . . three learning outcomes, I may have had part of them," Faith said. "But I didn't have everything done. [The instructor] knew that I was struggling. But, of course . . . everybody [else] is turning in the right

thing and had done it the [right] way, and I had to go back and start all over from scratch. . . .”

In sum, the evidence supports the fact that this theme or phase of receiving trusted feedback from the instructor was the most significant in terms of relieving the anxiety, stress, and frustration of the students, as they negotiated their way toward mastery of Kolb’s Model in their writing styles. During this two-week period the learners received feedback that they trusted from the instructor. So the issue was one of trust. All the study’s participants confirmed this finding. For a summary of these findings, see Appendix F.

Looking back at the Process of Writing Life Learning Papers

The first part of Chapter Four described the five phases or themes of the writing module experience for Covenant College adult studies students, focusing on the affective or emotional, behavioral, and problematic aspects of each one. The last part of the chapter addresses the participants’ reflections, interpretations, or meaning of this process. Running throughout these reflections is the notion of learning or change, particularly in the learners’ self-perceptions, which can be characterized in two ways, that is, instrumental or technical and expressive or affective.

The learners’ instrumental learning or change is manifested in their attitude about or confidence in their academic writing, as a result of the learning-to-write experience. The participants described a range of change in their perceptions of their ability to write academically from positive to negative.

The second category represents expressive learning or change in the learner’s perception of self. It is more a consequence of learning from prior learning than from

learning to write. The learners described the manifestations of this form of change from very little new learning to deep and profound learning about self and its relationship to others.

The purpose of this part of Chapter Four then is to describe richly and robustly the nature of the learners' reflections, understanding, or meaning of their experience in the writing module, which will be organized according to two categories of learning or change in self-perception; namely, instrumental and expressive.

Students' Perceptions of Instrumental Learning or Change

Although varying in degree, as a result of Module Two, most participants reported a positive change in their attitude about or confidence in their ability to write academically and thus to complete successfully the Adult Studies Program. Ariel was quite excited about the writing of the life learning paper and thus seemed to exemplify the most instrumental learning or change. She concluded, "You are better equipped, self assured. I try explaining to people about [the paper], but some things are kind of hard when somebody is not there to be in the midst of it themselves or see it. But I remember being excited about it around people, you know, what I was doing at the time, what we were learning, and so whether they understood it, I don't know."

Cheri also seemed to gain more confidence in her writing ability as a result of writing her Life Learning Paper (LLP). She noted that she no longer "dread[ed]" to write papers. "[Writing the life learning paper] really kicked off what we needed for writing all of our other papers. I mean without that [paper] . . . there were so many things that I couldn't remember about grammar; writing my first paper, I was like now wait a minute. . . . [The life learning paper] definitely improved my writing [by]

refreshing what I had long ago buried. In the Marine Corp you don't need language very much."

John was another example of a student who gained confidence from writing not only one, but seven life learning papers. "I feel more comfortable with my writing skills now and know that I have the materials . . . on hand to look back," he said. "I'm more careful with my punctuation. [And] I make sure that I take some time to read it . . . out loud to myself and [follow] the punctuation and everything and that's helped me. I'm realizing wait a minute, that doesn't make sense."

Faith, like John, said that writing the life learning paper had taught her "how things should be written . . . with great detail . . ." Yet she admitted that she had gained only a little confidence in her writing ability and her attitude about writing had changed very little. "[Module Two was] a whole writing class. This [was] what it was. So I still think I'm a lousy writer, regardless of what anybody else thinks. It's a self-perspective that I have and maybe I need to think that way to be able to do as well as I do. Maybe if a person gets over self-confident, [she] doesn't write as well. I don't have any idea. I still . . . don't have confidence in my writing, and I don't let anybody read it. I don't want anybody reading it, but the instructor." Yet, Faith confessed that if other students now asked to read her papers, she reluctantly allowed them to do so.

Jan felt much the same as Faith. She reported that only because she received an "A-" as a final grade in the module was she somewhat more confident as a writer. Yet, her greater confidence had no effect on her attitude about writing. "I don't like to write. No. I hate to write. . . . I'm not that good at all. No, it's not my favorite

thing to do.” Nevertheless, Jan conceded that writing the life learning paper had “helped [her] write [her] other papers. “I think anytime that you write anything, the next time you write, it should be a little bit better. And, of course, that’s your second time, your second paper, hopefully, [it does] get better” she concluded.

On the other hand, Bobbi, as has been well documented, was an example of a student who experienced a negative effect in her attitude and confidence about her writing ability. “[Module Two] didn’t help me in anyway. I was looking at it more like a help. . . . It definitely messed me up. It just took my style, [I thought,] okay, I’m not writing correctly. I need to do this and reflect on things, you know, and do all these things. And, I think, I already did that sort of [reflection]. I am a reflector anyway . . . but trying to write in these different groups and stuff kind of messed me up,” she said. “I really felt that . . . I was going to have to become a better writer from this class. I was just going to . . . have so many better attributes after finishing this class, so it was going to be all right, and I love to write anyway, so it was just like, oh, good, this is really going to help me . . . further along in my writing, but it didn’t.”

For her next critical synthesis paper, Bobbi “just didn’t know what to do.” She explained, “I didn’t know what to put on the paper . . . and I was really short and brief because . . . [the life learning paper] had made me lose my confidence and . . . what I knew was the right way to write and what [the instructor] wanted.”

Bobbi recalled that the Module Three instructor had written “Stick with me, Bobbi,” at the end of her CSP and had given her a “B” grade. “Like he was losing me, which wasn’t the case” Bobbi said. “It was just like, okay, what do you want? I

mean, I just sat there, and I never have problem writing. I can usually sit down and just write, write, write.” Eventually Bobbi said that she went to the Module Three instructor to let him know that she was “feeling confused and frustrated” about her writing

In sum, looking back on whether writing the life learning paper improved or positively changed their attitude or confidence about their writing ability, most students reported that it did. However, this instrumental or technical learning or change varied among the participants from positive to negative.

Students' Perceptions of Expressive Learning or Change

Some participants interpreted their learning or change in their self-perception as more expressive or affective. This change seemed to show itself most often in the participants' reconciliation or making of peace with past experiences and relationships. For instance, Cheri saw the writing module as an overall positive “growing experience” that seemed “to fit in with the rest of [her] Covenant College experience.” According to her, she was “heavily in education” and had learned during her incarceration that [she did not] “want to sit still in life.” During that time, she had realized what she had done in her life, how badly she had “screwed it up,” and she did not want to be “stuck” as she was. So her imprisonment “set off part of [her] drive for education.”

From revisiting her experiences with prayer in her life, which was the topic of her LLP, Cheri noted “that as little as you think you’ve grown, so often you actually find that you’ve grown [so] you can’t even see the past anymore. You can hardly recognize who you were.” She described how at first “the idea of prayer scared” her,

but eventually she found herself waking up “in the middle of the night, having nightmares, and before [being] fully awake, singing praise songs in [her] head. “So writing the LLP opened my eyes up to that [change in me] more than anything [else]” Cheri concluded.

Ariel found reconstructing her topic of divorce, which she said was her “expertise,” having been divorced three times, was “very therapeutic.” At the time of the interview, Ariel was again engaged to be married. But she was resisting the pressure from her fiancée and people from her church to remarry. “[Writing the life learning paper] helped me a lot to realize that I’m OK. Whereas before people made me feel uncomfortable . . . I see now I’m OK. It’s OK to be cautious. . . . Before [I would] just barge in and do it and say, ‘Well, everyone else is saying we should do it.’ Yeah, [the paper] was really good for me that way,” Ariel concluded. “You’re telling your story again. . . . Using Kolb’s [Model] . . . sorted it out. . . . You had your research part of [the paper], so you could feel almost validation [for your own experiences] . . . because you could find [your knowledge in] other places. Then you had your [active experimentation, that is, how you applied your knowledge], so that was therapeutic in the way that you got to get that out some more. Then it made you stop and think about what you [had] learned and how to apply it to the future. It did take you through many thought processes . . . It took you from the beginning to the end, to where a lot of time you could have closure on a lot of things.”

Specifically Ariel said that writing her life learning paper had taken “the panic out of things or . . . urgency . . . by going through it step by step and doing [the] paper. [I] could look at [the three divorces], visualize [them], see [them] on paper,

and say, ‘Gees, you know, everything has a beginning and an ending. I can remember that problems [would] come up, [and I would] have this feeling of urgency. I think I’ve learned from that [paper] that [the urgency] doesn’t need to be there. It is not necessary. [Writing that paper] helped me realize that life goes on. Things have a process to go through. You can’t put one thing before the other because it’s a process and it has to work its way out and it takes time. . . . So I see all the good things that came out of [writing that paper in Kolb’s Model]. At the end [I saw] the positive things that came out of it and how [I] could do things differently. [The process] helped me to realize there are different choices the next time I face things.”

For Faith, revisiting her topic of marriage and family had actually helped her to reconcile her divorce. In particular, she resolved her anger and hatred toward her first husband. “I guess by the time I finished writing the paper, I had never contrasted the two marriages before. For that [paper] I used both marriages all through [it], and . . . I had always looked at them as [each] a separate entity and never as something that one led to the other. . . . I used to absolutely hate my ex-husband, and since writing that paper and looking and going, you know what? It wasn’t his fault . . . and I blamed him for everything. . . . In our reflect back . . . we have to really think back on how things were; it’s just a whole different outlook on how [divorce] just happens, and some of the things that I let happen; and I didn’t realize that I let things happen. And so it was really nobody’s fault. That’s just the way it turned out, and everything turned out fine; and if it wasn’t for those experiences, I wouldn’t be where I am today. So . . . writing the paper did give me that outlook . . .”

Faith noted that this fundamental change in her perception of her former husband came as she was writing her concrete experiences. “And as I was writing each one [and then the third] . . . religion section . . . I was into that whole religion mode and . . . how things are supposed to be and how you are supposed to be with God. . . . About the time I got to . . . putting the third one together . . . that’s when I . . . started thinking, well, you know what? If I hadn’t done . . . and then I wouldn’t be . . . and da-ta-da-ta-da, so . . .” Faith said.

Faith described the change as “almost like . . . a weight off my chest. Just like I had felt that [burden] for so long and . . . blamed [my ex-husband] for everything for so long, and I shouldn’t have done that because everything was not his fault alone. And so it was almost like a renewal. I had this weight lifted off me now of all that anger taken off and then a sense of being a new person and just—it was a good feeling.” Although Faith acknowledged that writing her life learning paper had helped her “to just let go of all that hard feelings and hatred toward” her former husband, she still did not “trust” him. “You know, I will never trust him; he’s not a person who is trustworthy . . .” Faith concluded.

Even Bobbi, who was very outspoken about her dislike for the course, admitted that Kolb’s Model was “excellent” in helping her “to take it piece by piece” and “really reflect” on what it was like to grow up in an alcoholic family, the topic of her LLP. “That was really a great experience. It really made me feel a lot of things that I probably hadn’t felt or hadn’t dealt with,” she said. “I learned . . . that my dad was the alcoholic, but . . . my mom was such an enabler. . . . To see that [with my dad being sick and not drinking anymore, my mom] was doing the same thing with

my brother that she had done with my dad [i.e., putting his needs before her own]. It was just like, oh, my goodness, that was amazing to me. I knew what codependency meant, but not to that degree . . . and just the things that I . . . learned from that research [for the life learning paper] was just amazing.”

Yet some participants—John and Jan—claimed that they had experienced little or no expressive learning or change as a result of Module Two. Jan explained, “I don’t know if I can learn anything more than I’ve already learned from what I had gone through, I mean, because I’ve gone through all the bases, I think. . . . I’m just at the point in my life that . . . maturity wise I’m not really scared of anything because I think you get better mentally, knowledge, just the way you look at life, peace in you. . . . Things kind of slow down a little bit. I think you are more patient.”

John, although he had much to say about changing the curriculum and pedagogy of the module, had little to offer as to whether the writing experience had changed his perception of self. “I don’t think there is any class out there that is worthy of changing anyone’s life. I think it’s a part of the whole” he concluded.

In sum, the participants’ reflections on the learning-from-prior-learning experience stimulated expressive or affective learning or change in their self-perceptions. Most of that change had to do with making peace with prior experience.

Conclusion

In general, the participants’ reflections, understanding, or meaning of the writing module revealed a theme of learning or change in their self-perception. This theme seemed to be organized around two dimensions of learning, that is, instrumental or technical and expressive or affective. Most participants said that

their instrumental learning, as a result of writing the Life Learning Paper, appeared as an attitudinal change and more confidence in their academic writing ability. Most participants also experienced expressive or affective learning or change in their perception of self, particularly in regard to reconciling or finding peace with prior experiences and relationships. In Chapter 5, I will discuss what these descriptions and reflections could mean not only in the context of this study, but also in the adult and experience-based learning discourse.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) is a process used by many postsecondary institutions to award academic credit to adult learners for knowledge derived from life experiences. For the most part, PLA has focused on occupational or work-related experiences. A few institutions have extended this assessment process to significant life experiences not related to work such as divorce, job loss, or drug and alcohol recovery. However, we know relatively little about adult learners' experience in these programs. The life events that are often the focus of this process represent powerful, emotional experiences in the learners' lives. For this reason, I sought to develop a deeper understanding of their experience with such a process. In-depth interviews were conducted with six learners enrolled in an accelerated, degree-completion program at Covenant College, a small, church-based, liberal arts institution located in a small town in southwest Michigan.

The adults' experiences in the assessment module reflect a preoccupation with meeting its technical or instrumental challenges. Despite its unconventional and nontraditional focus and processes, the experience itself is interpreted by the students as a fairly traditional academic experience. Yet it elicited strong feelings and emotions such as anxiety, confusion, anger, and frustration. These feelings and emotions are elicited, however, from dealing with the technical writing requirements themselves and not from revisiting the experiences associated with prior life events.

Participation in this process appears to have contributed to some increase in self-awareness among the learners. Although one would anticipate such an outcome

of experiential learning activities, the process described by these learners illustrates a more complicated form of learning, one in which there are two forms of experiential learning occurring concurrently, with different levels of engagement by the learners and different outcomes. In this chapter, the theoretical implications of these findings will be discussed, as well as the implications for practice and further research in adult or experiential learning and assessment of prior learning.

Theoretical Implications of Study

The Assessment of Prior Private Learning (APPL) is a process of learning to write by reflecting on and writing about a prior life experience, and then connecting the learning from that experience to a broader body of knowledge. This overall process is grounded in two forms of experience-based learning. In one form, the students learn to write by writing; that is they learn by doing (Boud, Cohen, and Walker, 1993). In the second form, the students are learning from prior experiences by identifying meaningful life events, reflecting on them, writing about them, and connecting what they are learning from this process to a broader body of knowledge. The first form of experiential learning involves a reworking of their sense of self as a writer, while the second form evokes a reconstruction of the meaning these prior life experiences hold for the learners.

Learning by doing. The descriptions of the APPL process provided by the learners reflect their reliance on learning by doing. They seemed preoccupied with the writing process itself and its technical, theoretically based, checklist of demands (i.e., Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning). These requirements grab the learners' attention and keep them preoccupied or worried for most of the assessment of prior

learning experience. During this process, they described powerful feelings and emotions such as anxiety, confusion, frustration, stress, and insecurity.

This process of learning to write within a prescribed format evoked powerful emotions and therefore suggests a strong involvement of self. Yet there is little evidence that the learners reflected on the experience itself, the task of learning how to write by writing, or the learners themselves as persons learning how to write. We glimpse aspects of the self through their emotional reactions to the prospects of writing, but these powerful reactions are interpreted as byproducts of the task and never bring the self to the foreground in an explicit way (Tisdell, 1998).

The participants generally described Kolb's Model as a framework for a way of writing, instead of its intended purpose, that is, a theory for a form of adult learning. Ariel, for one, saw Covenant College's unusual interpretation or use of Kolb's Model as a good thing. "[It] . . . made it a lot easier to write a paper," she concluded. While Ariel felt the model helped her write, other participants felt more like Bobbi. ". . . I didn't care for it. I felt like I was very confident, a very good writer . . . and I struggled with that type of writing. It was awful" she concluded. "I was trying to write in that Kolb's. Yeah, I'm using the examples, and I'm trying to put it in the sections, and I was getting so frustrated because I wasn't just writing."

John described the writing of the life learning paper as "memorable." "We were new; it was traumatic; it was tough stuff; . . . it was by far one of the most memorable experiences any of us had had up to that point" he explained. "You've got new students who are just learning to write and now you're going to teach them to write in a whole different fashion, so there [is] a lot of stress associated with change.

And when there is already so much change as new adult students, [the life learning paper] was just one more thing . . . and it confused you. I realize that you have to teach it early because you're going to have to write life learning papers over the next 12 months and have those done. And I can see where that's logical, but it made it tough. And that's where I would have . . . taught it differently. And I think [the instructor] even speculated he would teach it differently."

John seemed to have captured well the dilemma or tension between the curricular demands or requirements and the students' needs or weaknesses as writers. In particular, the latter seem to be lack of confidence or a poor attitude about writing. However, the evidence does seem to suggest that writing the life learning papers does have a positive effect or change on these emotional or psychological blocks (Mezirow, 1991). What is required of the learners is an accommodation of an unusual model of learning how to write (i.e., Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning) into their initial writer's identity or style, and this adaptation must be done soon after arriving at Covenant College. For those who make this accommodation quickly and easily, they seem to experience a positive attitudinal change and greater confidence in their writing ability and thus their ability to graduate from the program.

In sum, what obviously rivets the learners' attention and stirs up their feelings and emotions the most is the structure of the paper and learning how to write by writing and using an unusual format. The learners complain that this technical or mechanistic way of writing or, more accurately, organizing a paper interferes or blocks their previous writing style. They found the process confusing, frustrating, and stressful, as accommodating any foreign language into one's native tongue might

prove challenging. Although the powerful feelings and emotions that the participants described in their encounter with learning how to write suggest a strong involvement of the self (Cranton, 1994; Dirkx, 2001; Mezirow, 1991), it remains oddly only implicit in this form of experiential learning. The learning-by-doing aspect of the APPL process evoked opportunities for self-reflective learning (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Brookfield, 1987; Dirkx, 2000; Mezirow, 1991; Tennant, 1995) that were not exploited in the module.

Learning from prior experience. In addition to the learning to write by writing (learning by doing), the participants also described a form of experiential learning in which they revisited and reflected upon a prior life experience, what I refer to as learning from experience. In contrast to the learning-by-doing dimension of this experience, their descriptions of learning from experience suggest a reconstruction of the meaning of these prior experiences within their present lives. In the learning-from-experience process, there is evidence that the involvement of the self is explicit and the focus of the writing experience. How deep this new learning was, however, seems to be related to the learner's level of engagement in reflecting upon or questioning their prior experience. Two of the participants seem to have resisted or refused to engage holistically (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1993) in the APPL experience. It is as if they only reported about their prior experience and the learning that they acquired at that time. During the reconstruction of prior experience, they remained aloof and unemotional, engaging in only minimal and superficial reflection or thought about their prior experience. For instance, John described his method of reflection as follows:

Well, I guess, reflective observation is certainly first person, and the concrete experience is what you did. But even reflective observation, I think, it's a whole warm, fuzzy section I dread. I hate it. I hate it. As a matter of fact, I had written a concrete experience, and I . . . just stopped because I said, oh, here's that, and I didn't even know where to go then. So I said, all right. I typically try to write three paragraphs for each section, and it spaces out about right, so it's a page, page plus. So I look back, concrete experience, what's my first paragraph say? Okay, what does that mean to me, what did I see in that first paragraph? Try to write another paragraph [of] reflective observation. And that's just the way I have to approach it, methodically.

An argument could be made that John failed to engage holistically in the APPL experience because of his topic (i.e., sales), which was more professional or public in nature than most life learning paper topics. But he titled his paper "Sales and Life" and talked about basic human values such as communicating with honesty and integrity and leading with trust and vision. From the evidence and my own experience of teaching APPL, these subjects, especially what learners know about communication, are often written about no matter the topic of the life learning paper. For example, Faith, who wrote about a very personal or private topic (i.e., divorce), also wrote about communication in relationships.

Furthermore, John stated that he would approach the reflection in the same methodical way for all seven of the life learning papers that he planned to write. His plan was to write one a month within the program's 58 weeks, so he could avoid taking any courses outside of the program to earn the credits to graduate with his

cohort. Some of his other topics would be much more private such as spiritual growth. Yet he seemed unable or unwilling to accept the importance of critical reflection in learning more deeply about self. He actually wanted to remove it from Kolb's Model. He recommended his own model:

. . . To me it would be the three-step process. You did something, that's fine—have the experience. You learn something, talk about what that was and what significance it has, and the final step, how you apply that and what it has meant to your life. That's the analytical person in me.

Perhaps even with his analytical or cognitive approach, John was more engaged emotionally and reflectively in his writing than his words would indicate. But when asked directly whether he was changed in any way by the APPL experience, John said, "I don't think there is any class out there that is worthy of changing anyone's life." He did, however, admit that his confidence in his writing skills grew. He was even thinking about writing a book. But evidently while writing the life learning paper, no new or deeper learning about his prior experience or himself occurred.

Apparently the same thing could be said about Jan. When asked whether she had learned anything new or changed from revisiting her topic of infertility, Jan said, "I don't know if I can learn anything more than I've already learned from what I had gone through, I mean, because I've gone through all the bases, I think." She explained this lack of change on the ". . . point in my life that . . . maturity wise, I'm not really scared of anything because I think you get better mentally, knowledge, just

the way you look at life, peace in you. . . . Things kind of slow down a little bit. I think you are more patient.”

In short, even though Assessment of Prior Private Learning has seemingly great potential for deeper self-awareness or learning, some learners missed the opportunity by resisting or refusing to engage actively and holistically and to reflect critically on their prior experience, whether public or private in nature.

Other learners such as Ariel, Faith, and Bobbi, however, did engage in a learning experience that resulted in a deeper understanding of self, suggesting a transformative experience. By transformative learning I mean reflective learning that finds assumptions or premises to be distorted, inauthentic, or invalid.

“Transformative learning results in new or transformed meaning schemes or, when reflection focuses on premises, transformed meaning perspectives” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 6). Therefore the learners have a deep or profound change in self-identity and are unwilling or unable to return to a previous state of being. The learners redefine themselves in relationship to others and make significant, life-altering changes in their behavior. For example, Ariel postponed, for the first time, getting married, which would have been her fourth marriage. Faith admitted, for the first time, her responsibility in the break up of her marriage and expressed a willingness to forgive her husband for the hurt and humiliation that she felt as a result of his unfaithfulness; and Bobbi recognized, for the first time, her anger and resentment toward her co-dependent parents, that is, her alcoholic father and enabling mother, and was beginning to deal with her feelings and emotions, especially toward her brother whom she also recognized as in a co-dependent relationship with their mother. She admitted

that Kolb's Model was "excellent" in helping her "to take it piece by piece" and "really reflect" on what it was like to grow up in an alcoholic family.

Others' level of learning seemed to be something less than transformative. Cheri, for instance, described her learning from writing about her incarceration in a military prison as more affirmation or corroborative of her growth and development since prior transformative experience (Tennant, 1995; Pratt, 1998). She noted "that as little as you think you've grown, so often you actually find that you've grown [so] you can't even see the past anymore. You can hardly recognize who you were."

By its very nature assessment of prior learning externalizes or objectifies or problematizes the learners' private prior experience in the form of written documentation and puts it and thus the learners into relationship with each other and the instructor through the sharing of these documents (Tennant, 2000). So as they are writing the papers, most learners who are successful in this APPL environment are engaged actively in not only a new experience, but also revisiting and restructuring a previous private experience. In other words, as the learners' are busy with the publicized subject of the course, that is, research writing, their subjective or private learning experiences are also becoming a "subject" and thus the "object" of public attention and discourse; namely, their life learning papers.

In essence, the Assessment of Prior Private Learning seems to be a way for learners to "reauthor" themselves (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999). The depth of this "reauthoring" or redefining or relearning of self could be explained, not by differences in topics, but by differences in the degree of engagement or critical reflection among the learners. In contrast to John and Jan, the other four participants

seemed more emotionally engaged and reflected more deeply about their prior experience. As noted above, Bobbi, Ariel, and Cheri all saw Kolb's Model as more than a college requirement for organizing a paper or improving their writing skills. None ever suggested that the reflective mode be eliminated or combined with another one. Instead, Bobbi and Ariel, in particular, acknowledged that the critical reflection, although emotional and difficult, lead to positive and profound changes in their perception, attitude, and assumptions about their prior experience and thus their present behavior and interactions with others. Faith described her reflective experience and learning as follows:

For the [paper] I used both marriages . . . and I'd never . . . looked at them as . . . separate [entities] and never as . . . one led to the other. And so I have a whole different outlook on how things are now. I used to absolutely hate my ex- husband, and since writing that paper and looking and going, you know what? It wasn't his fault. . . . I blamed him for everything . . . in our reflect back . . . we [had] to really think back on how things were; it's just a whole different outlook on how it just happens and some of the things that I let happen and I didn't realize that I let things happen. . . . Writing the paper did give me that outlook that . . . I had to go through those experiences to be who I am today, and if I hadn't . . . I wouldn't be where I am.

This thorough and deep reflection seemed to be missing from John's method of writing life learning papers. Avoiding this type of critical thinking about his prior experience—personal or professional—was probably why he “looked forward to” and found “traditional writing easier.” About that kind of writing, he explained, “You're

talking about . . . communications, so you may touch on three areas, but you're not following each one on Kolb's Model, and it's more traditional introductions, support information, and a closing paragraph. . . . It seems more natural because . . . here's what you did, here's what you learned, here's how to use it, sort of thing."

What seems to be missing from John's description of "traditional writing" is the personal nature of the content and the reflective mode that is required writing in the structure of Kolb's Model, where one thinks deeply, not only about one's own perspective, but also that of others', and questions widely the learning that might have occurred as a result of the experience. Perhaps these two pieces of the LLP writing process make it more challenging, that is, more emotional and thus more difficult for students to accommodate it into their identity as academic writers. For with the life learning papers, students for the first time must take a stand based mostly on what they think and know from their own experience, not what others think about it, which is not the case with more traditional academic writing and contrary to what and how most students have been taught in school. Therefore, at the same time they are starting a new program and writing their first traditional paper, probably for the first time in a long time, they are also being introduced to a nontraditional and unique method of writing. And this writing is unusual in more than content and structure. It is also represents not only a grade for a required course, but also many other credits in their bid to complete their bachelor's degree within a matter of months. It is high risk. Furthermore, as John pointed out, it is early on in a new academic game, and any transition or change is often accompanied by stress, confusion, and resistance to accommodation and thus learning.

In sum, the study clearly shows that the APPL experience actively engages or stimulates most learners. They are also holistically engaged, that is, all learning domains—cognitive, affective, and conative—are involved as they critically reflect upon or think about their prior experience and reconstruct that experience to meet not only the college's goals, but also their own (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). In contrast to the learning by doing, in the learning from prior experience, the self is explicitly present, and the revisiting or reconstruction of the meaning of the prior experience seems often to result in some form of learning or change in the learner's self-perception.

Whether the learning or change in self-perception is instrumental or expressive seems to depend, in part, on the degree of engagement of the learner—the deeper the involvement, the deeper or more expressive the learning. Among the participants, Jan was a learner who reflected very little as she revisited or reconstructed her prior experience of infertility and candidly admitted that she learned nothing new from the experience. In contrast, other participants such as Ariel, Faith, and Bobbi all reflected deeply and critically on their respective prior experiences and gained new meaning perspectives about themselves and their worlds (Mezirow, 1999).

Yet, considering the personal, expressive nature of these prior experiences, the fact that most of the strong, deeply held, and painful feelings and emotions associated with them (e.g., Faith's hatred of her former husband) are only implicit in the descriptions of the participants' reflections upon the learning-from-prior-learning experience. But most of the participants never mentioned such feelings and emotions.

So the question remains, How can we make sense of the way the learners talk or do not talk about the feelings and emotions associated with their prior experiences?

Making sense of absence of feelings and emotions associated with prior experience. Although strong emotions such as anxiety, confusion, frustration, and stress are abundantly evident in the findings, these feelings seem to be triggered mostly from the learning-to-write experience, not the learning-from-prior-learning experience of writing their Life Learning Papers. One explanation for this unexpected finding is that in some ways the second module in their program is a make or break experience for the adult learners. Because the entire program is writing intensive, if they fail to meet the challenge of successfully completing their first two writing assignments, the learners' chance of successfully completing the program and their bachelor's degrees is in jeopardy.

The students come to their second course with the paper from their first course in hand. During the previous week they have been dealing virtually on their own with this writing assignment, which determines 60 percent of their final grade. Then, with only some limited help from the writing specialist, who teaches the second course, the students are sent home again to struggle with not only completing that first paper, but also starting an even larger and more complicated writing assignment called a life learning paper. This paper also stands for 60 percent of the students' grade. But for most it also represents from two to seven credits in the completion of their degree. So the stakes are high for the students as they enter the writing module.

Yet most of the students are focused on only one thing—whether they have the ability to write well enough to complete the paper. Therefore, as they enter the

writing module, the learners are full of anxiety, frustration, and fear. This fact alone, however, is not surprising. Students often find composition exasperating and scary. What is surprising is the apparent fact that any strong feelings or emotions that the learners stir up from revisiting their prior life events are often overshadowed by those elicited from their experience of learning how to use Kolb's Model as a structure of a paper. So based on the study's evidence, an argument may be made that Module Two, Critical Analysis and Research Writing, is shaped by the mostly negative and strong feelings and emotions experienced by the learners; that is, anxiety, confusion, stress, and frustration. And these are only the affective responses mainly to the module's unusual use of Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning as a framework of learning how to write.

What is not evident from the study's findings and comes only from my own observations from teaching the module for five years is the additional stress or pressure that the students are under as neophytes in their accelerated degree-completion program. After only six weeks and one course, they are just beginning to understand, not only intellectually, but also affectively, what personal or professional changes are required in their lives to be successful in the program's accelerated format. Then as they struggle to make these changes, the students are further required to adjust or stretch their academic skills, especially their writing skills. By definition most have been out of school a minimum of two years and most for much longer. Moreover, their prior experience with academic writing may be less than positive or supportive. So as they enter the writing module they are feeling fearful, insecure, or

uncomfortable about themselves as writers and worried about whether they can write well enough to be successful in this adult or experiential learning environment.

Then they are almost immediately asked to write a long, difficult paper that until that point had been referred to as either a way to turn their prior experiences into college credits or to improve their writing skills. The focus has been completely on the instrumental nature of the experience, and the findings show that the learners' do experience instrumental or mechanistic learning or change in their attitude or self-confidence in the ability to write academically, as a result of learning-to-write experience. But along with this instrumental learning, most learners experience expressive or affective learning or change in their perceptions of self, as a result of the learning-from-prior-learning experience.

This latter result often occurs from the kind of intentional or reflective writing that the life learning paper provides. Yet this deeper learning about self is treated almost like an unimportant and unavoidable side effect, instead of something that should or could be nurtured and emphasized as an important part of any learning experience (Dirkx, 1997, 2001; Mezirow, 1990; Pratt, 1998).

Another explanation for the lack of descriptions of the learners' feelings and emotions in their descriptions of writing about prior experience could be the high degree of anxiety still associated with that experience. Having only recently revisited those feelings and emotions with the writing of the life learning paper, the participants may have avoided stirring them up again in the research interviews. Furthermore, in those interviews the participants were given their first chance to critically reflect upon the learning-to-write experience; therefore, their feelings and

emotions about it may have been stronger and more volatile than those associated with the prior learning experience. For the latter they may have already found a new or deeper sense of self and different ways of acting toward others. So they had a sense of closure for that prior learning. Most, if not all, the participants could be categorized in either one of these explanations for lack of feelings and emotions associated with learning from prior experience.

However, Bobbi could be an example of a third explanation for the absence of feelings and emotions associated with the learning-from-prior-learning experience. This explanation could be defined as a learner's "psychological block." In this case although the learner is "aware that he or she is not functioning well, that something is getting in the way of being the autonomous and responsible adult he or she aspires to be," he or she is anxious and fearful of change or, more specifically, the possibility of regretting making a change. He or she therefore remains blocked, that is, unwilling to reflect critically on his or her "distorted psychological premises," most resulting from childhood traumas, and the pain, hurt, and anger that this form of self-scrutiny might provoke (Mezirow, 1991, pp. 138-139).

In her interviews every time the subject of her family or her childhood would be mentioned, Bobbi would divert attention back to her confusion, frustration, and strong dislike of the writing module and her disappointing grade in it and the following module. There is evidence that she confronted some of her feelings about her difficult childhood and, in particular, her mother, while writing her life learning paper. However, these feelings were only implicit in the interviews, and she was very reluctant to share her life learning paper.

Although Bobbi appeared to have cracked open some of her psychological defenses by writing “piece by piece” and “really [reflecting]” on what it was like to grow up in an alcoholic family, she seemed to retreat from further breakthrough by diverting her attention and feelings toward the learning-to-write experience, instead of the learning from prior experience. Months later she was still upset about her experience in the writing module. “I have a lot to say about Module Two. When you came in [to talk about the study], it was like I didn’t care for it. I felt like I was very confident, a very good writer, and . . . I had been doing classes at the community college, had done classes at [regional public university]. I had always gotten A+s, As, great grades on my papers, and I struggled with that type of writing. It was awful,” said Bobbi. Thus she was able to construct a new psychological block, projecting her anger and disappointment onto the assessment of prior learning process and her grade, instead of confronting her anger and hurt with her parents and risk making profound changes in her sense of self and her relations with her family members (Boyd, 1991; Dirkx, 1997).

Finally, the lack of explicit feelings and emotions associated with the learning from prior experience may be only an artifact of the study. The appropriate questions that may have elicited these emotions were simply overlooked or missed in both the scheduled and follow-up questions.

Making sense of role of experience in learning by doing. Then there is the curious role of experience in this experience-based learning context. According to the writing module’s curriculum, Covenant College’s notion of experience is explicit, based on Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning. This view of experience and its

role in adult learning is then translated into a method or model for a learning-to-write experience. As such, according to the curriculum, the learners are shown, with techniques called “prewriting” (e.g., brainstorming, free writing, self-interviewing), how to identify “learning outcomes” from their prior experience.

This personal knowledge then becomes aspects or points of a life learning paper’s thesis statement. These points, in turn, are developed and supported by both the reconstruction of the learner’s specific prior experience, using the four modes of Kolb’s Model—concrete experience (CE), reflective observation (RO), abstract concept (AC), and active experimentation (AE)—and the broader body of knowledge from which the learner’s personal knowledge is grounded.

There is curricular and instructional support to help the learners differentiate each mode’s purpose, activity, and language. In particular, the learner is instructed to change his or her voice from subjective to objective, depending on the mode. For CE, RO, and AE, the learner writes in first person pronoun “I.” In AC third person pronouns—“he,” “she,” or “they”—are used. In general the experience could be described as technical, rule-based, and structured, and even with the supportive curriculum and instruction, the learners find it confusing, frustrating, and stressful, as documented by the study.

This notion or use of experience is rare, if not, unique in experiential or adult learning discourse. Kolb (1984) himself defined “learning” as a “process,” not “learning outcomes.” “Ideas are not fixed and immutable elements of thought but are formed and re-formed through experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 26). He further defined “experience” as a transaction or situation that goes on between a person and his or her

environment (Kolb, 1984, p. 35). So accordingly, the learners' learning-by-doing experience could be defined as the transaction or situation of assessment of prior learning in which they interact internally or individually (e.g., with the curriculum or instructor) and socially or collaboratively (e.g., with peers). But, as previously noted, there is no evidence that the learners critically reflect on their learning-to-write-by-writing experience, which, if done at the time, might turn the learning-by-doing experience into new or deeper learning or awareness about self (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Cranton, 1994; Dirkx, 2001; Mezirow, 1990).

There is certainly enough evidence to show that the learners are engaged actively and holistically in the learning-to-write-by-writing experience and primed emotionally for a deeper level of learning beyond the technical or instrumental learning that was reported. Thus by not providing curricular opportunities for debriefing or critically reflecting on the writing experience, "teaching (or learning) moments" seem to be missed (Dirkx, 2001; Dirkx & Prenger, 1997).

Practical Implications of Study

Based on this apparent missing of "teaching moments," one practical implication of the study would be to add debriefing or critical reflection exercises, both individual and group activities, to the assessment of prior learning curriculum. For example, a one or two-page journal entry could be assigned each week in tandem with the "circle" of the life learning paper. In the journal entry the learner would be encouraged to reflect upon his or her feelings about the writing process and how those feelings reflect upon him or her as a person or a learner (Cameron; 1992; De Salvo, 1999; Goldberg, 1986).

These journal articles could then be used for either full class or small group discussions about the writing process and what it means not only as an individual, but also as a group or collective (Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 1991, Tennant, 1995). If used for in-class revision or editing exercises, the reflective papers could also be used as a way to improve the learners' instrumental or technical writing skills. Furthermore, if these shorter papers were used for peer review, that is, shared out loud in small groups with the intent of listening for certain content, the learners' listening, collaborative learning, and editing skills could also be developed.

Yet because of the accelerated nature of the course and its already very full curriculum, the practicality of these suggestions would have to be studied. It is clear, nonetheless, that since assessment of prior learning is clearly grounded in experience-based learning, some critical reflection on the writing process itself is called for. In so doing the learners' strong feelings and emotions about the experience could be relieved and deeper learning about self could be nurtured (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Dirkx, 2001; Dirkx & Prenger, 1997; Mezirow, 1991; Tennant, 1995).

Further Research Implications of the Study

Perhaps the lack of strong feelings and emotions as the participants described their learning from prior experience was only an artifact of the study. This speculation calls for further study. The researcher may have failed to ask the appropriate primary or follow-up questions that would have elicited the emotional responses to the participants' prior learning experiences. Further questioning could uncover the feelings that were only implicit in this study.

Another possibility for the lack of strong feelings and emotions as the participants described their learning from prior experience could be explained by the apparent overshadowing of them as the participants talked about their strong feelings and emotions triggered by the learning-to-write experience. Yet those feelings and emotions are not addressed explicitly in curricular or instructional support of the module. Actually, the entire affective or expressive aspect of learning, although clearly strong and volatile in this experience-based learning context, seems to have been overlooked or neglected. Whether this apparent oversight has been intentional, as a result of institutional, social, or cultural pressures and priorities, is a question that calls for future study.

Further study of Covenant College's unusual interpretation of experience and Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning as an adult teaching tool is also recommended. As a learning-to-write frame, the questions remain: Is the institution's use of the Kolb Model achieving its educative goals and commitment to adult and experiential learning? Are the adult learners' writing skills improving? Are they gaining self-confidence as writers in this very writing-intense program? From the reflections of the participants, the answers to these questions seem to be mixed and therefore further inquiry is called for.

Moreover, the learning-to-write literature does call for the use of learners' experience (Cameron, 1992; De Salvo, 1999; Goldberg, 1986; Murray, 1998) and models (Zinsser, 1988). These models, however, are literary such as autobiographies, letters, and journal entries. This study appears to be the first time Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning has been put forward as a learning-to-write theory and practice

for adults in an experience-based learning environment. Further study therefore is recommended to evaluate its merits and distractions as both a learning-to-write framework and a heuristic tool.

Another somewhat surprising finding that calls for further study was the participants' mixed reviews of the fourth phase of the writing process; namely, sharing stories or peer review. Collaborative learning is a hallmark of adult learning pedagogy (Boyd, 1991, Brookfield, 1987; Dirkx & Smith, in press; Mezirow, 1991, Tennant, 1995). Yet, most of study's participants expressed suspicion or mistrust of this strategy as it is practiced in the writing module. Their perceptions of peer group learning reflects the claim by other researchers that many adult learners remain profoundly ambivalent about small group learning (Brookfield, 1986; Dirkx & Smith, in press; Dirkx & Smith, 2003; Smith & Berg, 1987)) But further study is called for to inform both the theory and practice of this strategy in experience-based learning

Conclusion

In this study I defined the Assessment of Prior Private Learning (APPL) as a process of learning to write by reflecting on and writing about a prior life experience, and then connecting the learning from that experience to a broader body of knowledge. The purpose and goal of APPL was for adult learners to earn college credits for the knowledge that they had acquired from personal life experiences. Based on the participants' descriptions, I concluded that the APPL process at Covenant College was grounded in two forms of experience-based learning: learning from prior experience and experiential learning. The latter form, specifically learning to write by writing, evidently grabbed the learners' attention and stirred up their

feelings and emotions more than learning from prior experience. Most of their strong feelings and emotions of anxiety and frustration seemed to be associated with the structure of the paper (i.e., a format based on Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning) and learning how to write by writing. The learners complained that this technical or mechanistic way of writing or, more accurately, organizing a paper interfered or blocked their previous writing style.

Yet these strong feelings and emotions clearly showed that the APPL experience actively engaged or stimulated most learners. They were also actively and holistically engaged as they critically reflected upon or thought about their prior experience and reconstructed that experience to meet not only the college's goals, but also their own. In contrast to the learning by doing, in the learning from prior experience, the self was explicitly present, and the revisiting or reconstruction of the meaning of the prior experience often seemed to result in some form of learning or change in the learner's self-perception.

Whether the learning or change in self-perception was instrumental or expressive seemed to depend, in part, on the degree of engagement of the learner—the deeper the involvement, the deeper or more expressive the learning. Yet, considering the personal, expressive nature of these prior experiences, the fact remained that most of the strong, deeply held, and painful feelings and emotions associated with them were only implicit in the descriptions of the participants' reflections upon the learning-from-prior-learning experience. Several explanations for this finding were put forward. One, it was simply an artifact of the study in which questions that would have elicited these feelings and emotions were not asked and

called for further study. Two, psychological blocks prevented the learners from addressing their strong, difficult, or painful feelings and emotions associated with their prior learning experience, and therefore they projected those feelings onto the learning-to-write experience. Three, the learners had found closure or peace with the feelings and emotions associated with their prior learning experience by writing their Life Learning Paper and chose not to stir them up again in the research interviews. Four, the writing module was a make or break experience for the learners in which their success or failure in the program relied on their ability to learn how to write a Life Learning Paper. Thus, their strong feelings and emotions were focused on the experiential learning aspect of APPL and not the learning from prior experience.

The notion of experience in the writing module was also a curiosity. The institution explicitly defined “experience” based on Kolb’s Model of Experiential Learning. Yet, the model was used not as it was intended (i.e., a framework for adults learning how to learn from experience), but as an outline for adults learning how to write by writing or a method of experiential learning. Nevertheless, it seemed to engage learners actively and holistically and therefore presented the possibility of learning more deeply about one’s self-identity as a writer or learner. But there was no curricular or instructional support for this kind of expressive learning. In other words, no reflection on the experience of learning to write by writing was afforded in the module. The practical implication therefore was that some kind of debriefing or reflection upon the writing process itself should become part of the curriculum.

This practical implication also called for further study as the course content was already packed and the timeframe short. Furthermore, whether the lack of

attention of the clearly strong and volatile feelings and emotions associated with this experience-based learning context had been intentional, as a result of institutional, social, or cultural pressures and priorities, was also a question that called for future study.

Because of the participants' mixed reflections of the writing module, further study of Covenant College's unusual interpretation of experience and Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning as an adult teaching tool was also recommended. Some of the questions that remained were whether the institution's use of the Kolb Model was achieving its educative goals and commitment to adult and experiential learning, whether the adult learners' writing skills were improved, whether they gained self-confidence as writers in a very writing-intense program?

Moreover, the models put forth in the adult learning-to-write discourse were more literary such as autobiographies, letters, and journal entries. This study appeared to be the first time Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning had been put forward as a learning-to-write theory and practice for adults in an experience-based learning environment. Further study therefore was recommended to evaluate its pros and cons as both a learning-to-write framework and an adult teaching and learning tool.

Finally, another somewhat surprising finding that called for further study was the participants' mixed reviews of the fourth phase of the writing process; namely, sharing stories or peer review. As a hallmark of adult teaching and learning, collaborative learning at Covenant College is not only an espoused theory, but also a theory in use. Yet, according to the study's findings, it was received mostly with

suspicion and mistrust in the writing module. The learners' perceptions of peer group learning reflected the claim by other researchers and called for further study of both the theory and practice of this strategy in experience-based learning

In conclusion, as with most studies while some questions were answered, many more were exposed. Nevertheless, the overarching question of the study seemed to be addressed, that is, the nature of the adult learning experience in the writing module at Covenant College has been described in five themes, phases, or sets of activities for the learners. Within each set particular behaviors, emotions, and issues were identified by the learners. The outstanding characteristic for each set seemed to be the learners' implicit or explicit feelings or emotions.

The nature of this experience could also be described as the nexus between two forms of adult or experience-based learning; namely, experiential or learning by doing and learning from prior experience or Assessment of Prior Private Learning. In this experience-based context, two forms of learning emerged from the participants' descriptions; namely, instrumental and expressive. The instrumental learning or change seemed to result in an improved attitude and efficacy in their academic writing ability. The expressive learning or change seemed to result in a confirmation or transformation of self-identity and peace-making with others associated with their prior life experience. The significance or depth of their learning seemed to depend on how actively and holistically the learners engaged in the experienced-based nature of the writing module.

Appendices A – D
Participants' Consent Form
Interview 1: Life History
Interview 2: Details of Module 2
Interview 3: Reflection on the Meaning of the Experience

Appendix A
Participant Consent Form
Interview Study
April 2002

As part of my EAD 999 Dissertation research at Michigan State University, College of Educational Administration Adult Life Long Education Program, I am conducting an in-depth study to investigate the experience of adult students who have participated in a prior learning assessment course that required extensive writing. The purpose of the study is to add to the adult learning, prior learning assessment, and adult learning for development and change scholarship. Specifically, the question for the study is, What is the nature of the experience that students have in Module 2 (WRT 312, Critical Analysis and Research Writing)?

During a three-interview series, you will be asked questions about your experiences both before returning to college and while taking Module 2, WRT 312, Critical Analysis and Research Writing. Each interview will last no more than 90 minutes. All three interviews will be completed during the month of April 2002, one each week for three weeks, beginning the week of April 15. I may also ask to read your Life Learning Papers, if that is agreeable to you.

The interviews will be audio tape recorded. The information that I collect from you will not be used in any way that would reflect on you personally and will not in any way reflect your grade in this course or your subsequent coursework. As I have not and will not be your instructor in any course, I will not have any influence on you or your grades in your program. What you say to me will be held in strict confidence and anonymity to the greatest extent allowable by law. I will not use your real names, places, or settings in any report of the data. I will use only alphabetical letters, numbers, or pseudonyms to identify each interviewee.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If you choose to participate in this study, I hope that you remain involved and committed for its entire three-week duration. If you are willing to participate, please sign the consent statement below.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact the investigator, John Dirks, Ph.D., by mail (Department of Educational Administration, Michigan State University, 408 Erickson Hall, East Lansing, MI, 48824) by phone, 517-353-8927, by fax (517-353-6393, or e mail, dirks@msu.edu). If you have questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant you may contact Ashir Kumar, M.D., Chair of the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) by phone: (517) 355-2180, fax: (517) 432-4503, email: ucrihs@msu.edu or regular mail: 202 Olds Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824

Informed Consent Form, p. 2

Sincerely,

Falinda Geerling

Doctoral Candidate

Michigan State University

If you have any further questions, you may contact me at (616) 735-0630 or
falindag@arbor.edu.

I agree to participate in this study as described above.

Date:

Full Name (please print):

Signature:

Address:

Phone (home):

Cell:

Fax:

E Mail:

Appendix B
Interview 1: Life History

The purpose of Interview 1 is to establish the context or setting of the research. The time allotted is between 60 and 90 minutes.

1. How did you come to participate in the Covenant College (CC) Adult Studies Program and thus Module 2? What difference did returning to college make in your life?
2. Although we will focus our attention on your experience in Module 2, I would like to explore other learning experiences in your life for now?
 - A. How did you decide to come back to college?
 - B. What do you hope to accomplish with your college degree?
3. What can you tell me about your family? Work? Community?
4. Demographic Information
 - A. Age
 - B. Race
 - C. Gender
 - D. Income Range
 1. 0 - \$15,000
 2. \$15,000 - \$30,000
 3. \$30,000 - \$45,000
 4. \$45,000 - \$60,000
 5. \$60,000 - \$75,000
 6. \$75,000 - \$90,000
 7. \$90,000 +

Appendix C
Interview 2: Details of Module 2

The purpose of Interview 2 is to investigate what the interviewee's contemporary experience was like in Module 2. The time allotted is between 60 and 90 minutes.

1. What was it like to be an Adult Studies student in Module 2?
2. In general, how would you describe (reconstruct) your experience in Module
3. In particular, how would you describe your experiences with the following:
 - A. The first night of class
 - B. Any other class night
 - C. The individual conference with the instructor
 - D. The writing process
 - E. Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning
 - F. Library Research
 - G. Peer Review
 - H. Computer Technology
 - I. Relationships with advisor and instructor
4. What do you think about the time allotted for Module 2? Just right? Too much? Too little? Explain.
5. Did you find the written materials helpful? If yes, how? If not or only somewhat, why?
6. Did your library and computer skills change as a result of Module 2? If so, how? Was this an important change for you? If so, why?
7. What was your topic for your Life Learning Paper topic?
 - A. How did you decide on this topic?
 - B. What did you learn from revisiting that topic?
 - C. Have you applied that knowledge to other problems or issues in your life? If so, how and why?
 - D. Would you say that writing your LLP could be related to any change in your life? If so, how would you describe that change? What do you do differently since taking Module 2? Do you think or feel differently about situations or issues? If so, how?
8. How would you describe Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning to someone who had never heard of it before?
 - A. When required to use it in Module 2, what was that like?
 - B. Have you used it since Module 2? If so, how and why?
 - C. Did you find it helpful in understanding how adults learn experientially and how they have different learning styles? If so, did that change your attitude about learning as an adult? If so, how would you describe that change? Has it changed your behavior in any way? If so, how?
 - D. Did you find it helpful in looking at situations or issues from different perspectives as in the Reflective Observations mode of the model? If so, was that a change for you? How would you describe that change? Minor or major?

9. How did you learn in Module 2?
- A. When you were working on your paper at home, what was that like?
 - B. When in class, in your small group, working on your paper, what was that like?
 - C. When working on your paper with the entire class, what was that like?
 - D. What was the one-on-one conference like?
 - E. If you were required to write a LLP on your experiences in Module 2, what would your thesis statement be?
 - 1. Have you applied these learning outcomes in other situations or issues in your life?
 - 2. Which part of Module 2 was most helpful or valuable? Least helpful or valuable?

Appendix D
Interview 3: Reflection on the Meaning of the Experience

The purpose of Interview 3 is to put meaning to the experience(s) of Module 2. The time allotted is between 60 minutes and 90 minutes.

1. Given what you have said about your life before you became a student at CC and given what you said about your experience in Module, how do you understand this experience in your life?
 - A. What sense do you make of Module 2?
 - B. Would you say that you were changed in any way? If so, how would you describe that change? If not, why?
 - C. What does it mean to you for having participated in Module 2?
 1. Did you feel more confident as a student?
 2. Do you have more confidence in your ability to think, write, and learn?
 3. Has your self-image changed? If so, how?
 4. Has your attitude about writing changed? If so, how?
 5. Have you applied what you learned in Module 2 to the modules following it? If so, what or how have you applied that knowledge?
 6. Would you recommend Module 2 to other students?
 7. How would you describe Module 2 to someone who was unfamiliar with it?
 8. How did you feel the first night of Module 2? By Week 11, academic planning night?
2. Other follow-up questions will be based on the data that is collected from the other two interviews and on areas that need to be probed based on the research problem and analytical framework of the study.
3. Although these protocols look like three separate interviews, the researcher is aware that not only the primary research question, but also flexibility and discernment in the interview process drive a study. An honest attempt will be made to follow this schedule whether it occurs in one, two, or three separate interviews.

Appendix E
Participants' Profiles

Appendix E Participants' Profiles

Ariel

Before coming to Covenant College, Ariel, 46, confessed that she had been in a cycle of "always doing the same things and getting the same results." This cycle could also be called marriage and divorce--three each over about a 20 year period. From each of the first two marriages, Ariel had two sons, 22 and 12 years old.

Despite the break up of her last marriage after only five months and with no substantial income at the time, Ariel was able to keep the unfinished house that she and her third husband had started. One of her resources was to reopen her day care business. For many years Ariel had been a day care provider and voted Day Care Provider of the Year by the local Chamber of Commerce.

By resuming that business and finishing the house one project at a time, she has been able to live there with her two boys. Although Ariel was engaged again at the time of the interview, she said that she was in no hurry to get married. Her fiancée had also been married three times, and she said, "[I am] very, very cautious [about getting married again]."

Even with her many disappointments and set backs in love and marriage, Ariel seemed to have a positive, inspirational attitude about life and its hard lessons: I've always said even when I was on a plane coming back [from CA to MI], leaving my [first] alcoholic husband . . . I can remember saying a prayer to God and saying thank you so much for having me go through this adversity because I would have never known what alcoholism was. And I felt that I had grown. . . . I wouldn't trade it for anything because I feel like I've grown . . .

In large measure with no clear goal in mind other than "to get out of day care," her love and appreciation for learning seemed to be what brought Ariel to Covenant College. Having attended three different colleges or universities, Ariel had this to say about higher education: Well, I think no matter where I [have gone], it's always provided for me an outlet to feel good about myself . . . something I could accomplish. So it always makes me feel good. I like the environment of learning, and . . . this time going to Convenient College, I'm taking . . . a [family life education] program . . . [I] can define [my] own life [experiences] that [I'm] learning, so it's kind of a double plus. Furthermore, when she does make a career move, Ariel said that "it [had] to be a helping field." She also liked the idea of getting her master's degree. "I think there would be more doors open, maybe a better pay scale, and maybe more freedom . . . [more] flexible hours. . . . Right now . . . I'm little bit spoiled [with day care]."

Finally, as with the other adult students in the study, Ariel was also as active as she felt she could be in her community, particularly her church. "I try to participate when I can at church, and it's just small [things], cleaning up or whatever and doing yard work. . . . I feel like my time, especially being a single mom, is very valuable to my family, and I just feel a need to be home. One night of school a week is plenty . . .," she said.

Bobbi

Bobbi was a 38-year-old, stay-at-home wife and mother. Her husband, 40, was a former police officer. At the time of the interview, he was an insurance investigator. They had two children--a twelve-year-old boy from Bobbi's first

marriage and a seven-year-old girl from her current marriage. The family lived in a four-year-old development outside of a small town in south central Michigan. Bobbi was the only participant to be interviewed in her home. The other interviews occurred at the college's off-campus sites.

Bobbi had a rather unusual work history. She was a retired Michigan State Police Officer. For twelve years she had worked in her home town in southwest Michigan. The previous five years she had been a county sheriff dispatcher. Although both her brother and father, a retired police chief, worked for the local police department, Bobbi had had no intentions of becoming a "cop." Yet the sheriff unintentionally spurred her on, according to Bobbi, by stating that "women had no place on the road" and by not letting her "ride with the guys" or do anything else besides dispatch. She reported that she said, "Women can go places," and promptly applied to the Michigan State Police Academy. That was in 1987. After being accepted into the academy, Bobbi endured 17 weeks of military-styled training. She recalled that 130 cadets started the program, but only 79 graduated. Bobbi was one of 29 out of 31 women who graduated.

Eventually Bobbi said that she began to investigate more and more of the child abuse cases that occurred within the two southwest Michigan counties in which she worked. She said that she started when the post's juvenile youth officer, who had a "catch-all" type of position and was doing the CSCs (criminal sexual conduct cases), reached the point of "real burn out." Gradually Bobbi's caseload climbed to over 300 CSCs.

Bobbi said that she became good at her job, particularly interviewing allegedly abused children, not only because of trial experience, but also because of the inspiration of two women. In particular, she met one of these women through the Michigan district court system. She was a counselor and expert witness in cases involving child abuse. Bobbi acknowledged that “[this woman] was a real inspiration and still is to me. That’s what I want to do. I want to work with these kids and help these kids who have been abused to deal with that [trauma and the court system].”

Not only this woman, but also her own children inspired Bobbi to return to school to prepare for a career transition from police work into social work. She explained, “With criminal [work] . . . you’re having to track [the suspects] down at their houses, and, I mean, it’s a real dangerous situation. . . . [I]n police work things change after you have your own children, where I would take a lot higher risk [before] I had my own kids. . . .” So in 1998 Bobbi retired from the state police to become a full-time wife and mother. But 18 months later she admitted that she felt as if she was “losing something.” She described this uneasy feeling as “just like I was . . . spacier (sic), like I wasn’t using my brain . . .” As a result of not “being mentally challenged anymore,” Bobbi returned to a regional public university, which she said restored her “self-confidence.” Yet she was dissatisfied with its academic program. So in the fall 2001, Bobbi applied and was accepted into Covenant College’s Adult Studies Program. With the intention of becoming a social worker, she chose the Family Life Education major. At the time of the interview, she was leading the life of

a typical adult college student; she was active not only in school, but also with her family, work, and community.

Cheri

Because of her father's alcoholism and drug addiction, Cheri, 36, described herself as a member of a "dysfunctional family." She also acknowledged that her father played a part in her enlistment in the Marine Corp. Her story was similar to Bobbi's. Whereas a sheriff's gender biased remark about "women having no place on the road" inspired Bobbi to enlist in the state police academy, Cheri's father's derisive laugh and look of "there is no way that you could ever make it" pushed her into enlisting in the Marine Corps. From that time, 1985, when she was only 18 years old, until about 1989, Cheri reported that she continued to live recklessly and stubbornly. Then, at the age of about 22, she found herself in a military brig or jail. Three months later, she was transported to Leavenworth Military Prison, where she spent 18 months for embezzlement. In 1991 she was dishonorably discharged from the Marines, having fulfilled her six-year commitment.

At first, despite partying every night and going into work many days "still drunk," Cheri held a responsible position as a sergeant in what should have been a captain's billet or position. She explained, "Experience, schooling, it should have been a captain. They felt that I had the intelligence, the drive to fill it." Cheri was in charge of the food catering for all the parties on the base such as "mixers" and graduation dinners. She also "worked for the chow hall too." Consequently she had access to a budget from which she withdrew "several large chunks at a time."

As her life unraveled, mostly because of her excessive drinking, frequent sexual encounters, and an abusive marriage, Cheri blamed the Marine Corp. "And during this time I had a captain that said, 'Well, I think you just want to stay married to him.' And it really hurt me. . . . I just completely shut down. And when I did that, I decided to hurt the Marine Corp, and I stole \$10,000."

In military prison Cheri's thinking made a significant and profound turn around. She stopped blaming the military and others for her situation and unhappiness and for the first time in her life put the blame squarely on herself. "At that point I—well, coming into prison I was scared. And I decided eventually that I had to be taken to rock bottom because while I was sitting there, I had come to the point that I had decided that, okay, I am a strong person. I can run my life. And then I was sitting in jail going, yeah, dummy, look what you did with your life," she said.

At that point Cheri said that she gave up trying to control her life and turned to a Higher Power to help her get through her prison experience. While I was sitting in jail, I turned around, and I knew that I was lousy at running my life; knowing Christ, I finally decided right [there], I am going to give it to [Him]. And throughout that [prison experience] a plan came that I wanted to go to school. And if it meant that I had to expose my past to others, as ashamed of it as I am, then so be it. At the time I knew I wanted to work with people that were hurting. And so I turned around, and coming out of prison, I already knew my [future] husband. (They had met "out in the yard and in the galley" in the brig. He was there for writing bad checks.) We got married a week after I got out," Cheri explained. Immediately upon her release from

prison, she went to meet her future husband, who had been released earlier and had gone back to his home town in Michigan.

At the time of the interview, they had been married for 11 years. Although Cheri and her husband have no children, she said that she tells people that she has four—three dogs and a husband.

Immediately after arriving in Michigan, Cheri enrolled in a local community college. But because money was tight and they needed to buy large items such as a new car, she ended up working full time in the quality control area of a local factory. Then, two years ago Cheri and her husband had become very active in a local church. Both took on leadership roles; he as the men's minister and she as the youth minister. At that time, Cheri said that she felt as if she had been "called" to that ministry and that is when she decided to earnestly pursue her college education.

That track was what brought Cheri to Covenant College. She said that she enrolled in CC "because [she] wanted to complete [her] bachelor's [degree] and . . . needed a school that was a Wesleyan tradition . . . [and had] classes to coordinate with the Nazarene system [of] ordination." Yet she has no plans to attend seminary. Instead she will be ordained through the home study program offered by the Nazarene church, which she plans to complete at the same time as her bachelor's degree in Family Life Education in October 2003. With her college degree Cheri hopes to ". . . be the best youth pastor that I can be. Well, actually I will probably go for my Master of Counseling, so that I will be able to fall back on counseling."

Besides school and her youth work, Cheri said that she was recently asked to serve on the Christian Athletes Fellowship Board. She said that she would probably

accept that responsibility because “[teenagers] are totally out of it. They don’t do anything. Their eating is atrocious. The idea of working out just doesn’t fit [in their lifestyle]. . . . And then I think people need to see that you can be an athlete and you don’t have swearing up a storm . . . or drink or . . . drugs.”

Faith

According to Faith, she had come to Covenant College looking to complete a bachelor’s degree in a hurry. She already had an associate’s degree in Applied Science and was a certified physical therapist assistant. Because she liked the work so much, she decided to become a full fledged physical therapist, whose credentials require both a bachelor’s and a master’s degree. She had already found a master’s program that she wanted to attend at a regional college and was looking for a bachelor’s program that she could “get . . . in and get . . . out.”

After hearing about the college on the car radio, Faith called and set up a meeting with an admission specialist. According to Faith, at that meeting she told the admission specialist, “I’ll be fast, you know. . . . I’ve got to get a bachelor’s degree and I’ve got to get it fast. . . . And I like this [Management in Organizational Development major]; [it] is really interesting . . . [and giving] me a lot of insight [into] how businesses are run and how management works and companies are organized. I think I’ll do really well when I get my master’s degree and I’m a physical therapist; if I ever go into management or . . . decide to open my own business . . . I think it will be an excellent background,” she concluded.

Nevertheless, Faith considered herself the “odd man” in her cohort. “I think God said, ‘Okay, you don’t know this yet, but I’m sending you here, and this is going

to be something that is going to help you in the long run.' I really do believe that because He makes things happen," she said.

Having recently had a baby, Faith was a stay-at-home mother at the time of the interview. She also substituted very infrequently, according to her, for other PTAs at two home health care companies. "[My husband's and my] plan is I will go to school, and when I graduate, [he is] going to retire [from a private postal service company] because I want to work. I love being a PT. I love working with patients. It's a passion that I have. I really enjoy it. . . . A patient comes in and [he] can't even walk, and after six weeks of working with this patient, three days a week, [he's] walking pain free. It is because I've helped [him]," said Faith.

She also said that "doing college" was important as an example for her children. Besides her six-month-old baby girl, Faith has two boys from her first seven-year marriage--a fourteen-year-old, who would soon be leaving to live with his father in a southern state, and a 12-year-old. "I should have [gone] to college when I got out of high school, but I didn't know any better. My mother . . . went to college, but [she] never told us you need to go to college That's really important for you. And so I didn't go. . . . I had no clue."

At 18, having graduated from high school and wanting "out of [her] mother's house," Faith confessed that she married a man "very similar to what my mother had married. I had married my father basically. I married a bum. . . . I was always the one who had a job. I was always working 40 hours a week. And so . . . when I thought he was at work, he wasn't at work. I thought he had a job, he didn't have a job." He was also seven years older than she was. Yet because of her religious

convictions, Faith had remained committed to her vows. Then after her second child was born, she discovered that her husband had been unfaithful to her. So she divorced him.

At 35, Faith was again married to a man seven years her senior. They had also been married for seven years. For four years the family lived on the south side of a large metropolitan area in south central Michigan. Then three years ago they moved to a small town not too far from that city. Faith described it as “a great community” that “stayed together and supported one another.” Most likely because of her busy schedule, Faith mentioned no other community involvement. She also never offered whether she attended any place of worship. However, she did mention that she had been baptized only a year ago and that she attended a women’s Bible study

John

Although the only man in this study, John’s story of how he found his way to Covenant College had a familiar ring to it. After graduating from high school in 1985, he too somehow deviated from his life and career plans. He started at [the local community college] and attended for three years, “having anticipated becoming a packaging major at [the regional public university].” However, when he failed Physics twice, John realized that he “was not going to be able to be a packaging engineer.” He described that time as “very stressful.” He added, “. . . I lost my way and decided that I wasn’t going to get into packaging. Therefore, I didn’t know what I wanted to do, so I quit college.” At the same time his girlfriend, who would eventually become his wife, “was in dental hygiene . . . and decided that [profession]

wasn't what she wanted to do, so we did what any confused 21- or 22-year-old kids would do and got married." Since 1988 John and his wife have been married, and they have two children--a six-year-old daughter and a twelve-year-old son.

After 14 years John called the experience of coming back to school in 2001 "very humbling." He explained, "[Literally] when I wrote papers for writing classes at [the local community college], I really wrote papers with real live pen on paper, and now you come into the computer technology. And it's sort of a wake up call. I'm learning as I go."

Although he stated it somewhat differently from the women in the study, John's motivation for returning to school came from the value that he placed in higher education. He said, "... realizing that [college] was something that I never completed, and I think that there's always that inkling in the back of your mind of inferiority because other people have degrees. No matter [whether] you know that to be [the] contrary, you always have this nagging feeling that they're smarter than you." Furthermore, John, 35, said that his "work is very, very stressful, [and] to move on, even in sales, you often have to have a degree. Your experiences aren't going to matter. Even though I'm good at what I do, they're going to say, 'Where's your degree?'" Since he quit college, according to John, he has been in sales. First, he sold retail jewelry items for four years and then commercial printing services for ten years.

John admitted that he chose Covenant College Adult Studies Program in order to get a bachelor's degree as quickly as possible. But then he said that he had been pleasantly surprised" by "what the [Management of Organizational Development

major] really [meant] and what it could mean to my future. . . . This ability to really attach a name to what I've always thought, the ability to analyze things, figure out what's wrong with them, implement change, all the things that I can't do where I'm at, so it surprised me in a good way that I think it may well become my career. . . ."

John mentioned that he had applied at only one other company for the position of director of sales and client services. However, he was turned down because of his lack of management experience. "But," he said, "that was just preliminary and that's my frustration. I enjoy what I do. I like my clients a lot. I'm just not happy with the day-to-day operations, and I think we have some 'system fit' problems, as we would say in MOD, and I can't fix them." John said that with his bachelor's degree he hopes to be in a position where he can not only recognize what is not working, but also "shape policies or situations" that will fix the company.

Yet John explained that more than career ambitions brought him to Covenant College. It was a potentially fatal car accident in which a young boy, while crossing a busy intersection, was hit but not seriously injured. John summed up that event as "the moment," "the life-altering experience" when he realized that he had "a lot of need to learn." He explained that had been sitting at a red light and witnessed the boy fly up into the air and land on the ground. After calling 911 on his cell phone, John assisted at the scene until the police arrived. Then he said that he "started driving home and . . . lost it. I couldn't tell you the last time I shed a tear for anything in my life. And I just flat out lost it. [I] picked up my son from day care, and . . . I'm trying to talk to them about it. Are you teaching my kid safety and road crossing? And [I'm]

balling. I can say that was probably that one event that clicked in my mind as the moment at which I really started evaluating life.”

Following that event some “religious things” happened in his life, according to John. For instance, when a client said that he would pray for John, he was “just floored” because he “had never heard of people doing that” for each other. “So,” he concluded, “when I’ve had those kinds of events . . . leading me along, and after I’ve chosen to go ahead [and return to school] . . . when I was at a Christian college, I kind of smiled to myself that maybe it wasn’t quite an accident that I ended up here. . . . I don’t know if I’m worthy of saying that I’ve been ‘called.’ I just feel it’s the right place to be, so I’ll take it for that.”

Unlike the women in the study, John had several hobbies, including collecting hand guns, fishing, and hunting. For relaxation and release from stress, John said that he goes to the shooting range for an hour or so. But bass fishing apparently held a special meaning in his life. He called the sport’s opening day a “religious holiday.”

John described the small town in which his family lived as the “kind of environment” in which “half the neighbors don’t even lock their houses Kids [are] everywhere, and there are a lot of people our age.” Furthermore, the entire family was “very involved in sports.” In addition to his family’s activities, John was active in his church and a local Toast Masters, where he had recently won “Rookie of the Year.” At the time of the interview, he had been thinking about volunteering as a liturgical minister and as next year’s club president.

Jan

Although she had several reasons for returning to school, the bottom line for Jan, 44, was preparing for her retirement from a large automobile manufacturer. She explained, “. . . I can retire in six years, and I’m driving [from my hometown] to [the city of the manufacturer] every day, so if I have a bachelor’s degree, I’m more likely to find another job [here at home] when I retire. Because I have a two year old at home . . . I’m going to have to work until I’m 62 or 65 years old.”

In the meantime, because their son was a “surprise” and they did not want him in day care, Jan’s husband, 44, retired from drywall installation to stay home full time with him. Because they had purchased her family’s farmhouse, the couple also did not want to move closer to Jan’s workplace. “So,” Jan concluded. “I’m making the sacrifice of doing that [commuting], and [my husband] is doing the sacrifice of . . .” Jan was unsure of what “sacrifices” her husband was making. Nonetheless, they did appear to have an unconventional lifestyle.

That lifestyle had begun almost three years before as a result of Jan unexpectedly finding herself expecting. “Yeah . . . I never thought I could have kids. In fact, I was almost seven months [pregnant] before I realized I was pregnant.” During her first 10-year marriage she “had gone through so much fertility stuff” without success. So during those seven months Jan thought that she was only “going through [her] change of life.”

Besides her son, Jan had two adult step children from her husband’s previous marriage and two grandchildren. Although her basic reason for returning to school was to prepare for a career move, Jan said that she “always wanted to have a bachelor’s degree at least.” She mentioned that she already had five associate’s

degrees, beginning with law enforcement and business, then design and drafting, and also general education. The last three, according to Jan, were related to her work at the automobile manufacturer. The first two resulted from her plan to be a police officer. However, because she was "always scared to go to the [regional public university] . . . to park," Jan never completed a bachelor's degree. Yet, she said, ". . . when you get forced from work--they're saying you have to go--it kind of puts the fire underneath your feet, and you just go."

The pressure from work had resulted from the automobile manufacturer's attempt to combine its design and engineering departments, according to Jan. "I'm a designer and have been a designer for ten years. And then they combined the design and engineering together, and engineers have to go back and learn the Unigraphics, which is the computer system that we use, and the designers have to take some engineering classes. But if you have a four-year degree, you only have to take like two engineering classes. So it's a better way to go, whereas other designers that take engineering classes . . . don't get a degree; they get a certificate that's only good at [the automobile manufacturer]. And I didn't want to do that because [of my retirement plans]."

Over the 23 years that she had been at the automobile manufacturer, Jan's job title had changed several times; she was currently called a "designer engineer." She explained that people in that position made "[car] parts on a computer, simply." As a result of her law enforcement degree, Jan had started at the automobile manufacturer as a security guard. When the manufacturer went to private security, Jan decided to take a "very competitive" test for designers and passed it. Then for the next two

years she attended a design engineering program at a community college near the plant. "You had a gun to your head; you had to keep a "B" average. It was very stressful. . . . And so I did that and that's how I became a designer, which really isn't my passion. My second life I'll come back as a police officer or a nurse. I like that kind of person. I'm not a sit-in-front-of-the-computer [person]. I used to be so thin. . . . But it doesn't do any good to complain. I mean, there are parts of the job that I like. When I was in "Help Control" actually. I'm just a help [to new employees]. I have the nickname "Mom" at work." When she does retire, Jan said that she hopes to get a position at a local insurance company either in Human Resources or sales.

Although her job title or duties had changed regularly, Jan's living arrangements seemed steadier. For instance, she and her husband had recently purchased her family's farmhouse with a three-acre lot that was part of the original 140-acre family farm. Until the recent death of her bother, it had been in the family since 1933. The farmhouse had been built in 1900, according to Jan. Because the decedents of her father's two brothers own much larger farms (thousands of acres) on either side of her property, Jan said that she is surrounded by family. At the time of the interview, they were planning a paternal family reunion later that year in which she anticipated over 100 attendees. Jan herself had nine siblings.

Because she was no longer practicing her Catholic religion, Jan said that she "switched to the Methodist religion." However, she admitted, "I'm not really practicing that hard. I'm going to do it more when my son gets bigger. I'm more spiritual." Someday she hoped to get more involved with the "little things," as her mother-in-law is.

Appendix F
Summary of Phases, Themes, or Set of Activities
of Writing Module Identified by Participants

Appendix F
Phases, Themes, or Sets of Activities of Writing Module Identified by Participants

Phase	Action/Behavior	Affect/Emotion	Issue/Problem
One	Moving Into Module Two	Anxiety and confusion	Question whether writing good enough to make the grade and stay in the game
Two	Accommodating Writer's Self-Identity	Frustration and stress	Question how to adapt writing style to foreign model of learning how to write
Three	Connecting the Particular to the General	Confidence No concern or worry	Question the fastest way to find required research
Four	Sharing Stories or Peer Review	Affirmative and Relationship Building or Competitive and Mistrustful	Question whether sharing stories provided trusted feedback from peers
Five	Receiving Trusted Feedback	Relief, Affirmative, supportive, and trusted	No question that feedback from instructor was trusted and provided emotional relief and support in final phase of accommodating and building confidence in new writer's identity

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