

Psycho-Social and Academic Readiness for Health and Human Service Education

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigated the educational experiences of first year human service diploma students at the Truro campus of the Nova Scotia Community College. The focus group inquiry provided a research approach whereby students, faculty and the center for student success personnel and academic chairs could engage the moderator and each other in making meaning of students' motives, expectations and readiness for pursuing human service education.

The study examined the psychosocial and academic readiness of first year students to engage immediately is critical discourse regarding human needs, society and self. This inquiry also explored whether a parallel existed between psychosocial identity status and lived experiences of students. Multiple factors of readiness were considered in order to assess the extent to which these psychosocial factors impact the quality of learning, levels of success and goal attainment of individual learners. Disclosures, shared experiences and perspective taking of focus group participants generated similar and distinct themes revealing the complexity of psychosocial readiness unique to each student. Identified themes included motivations for enrolling in the program, learning demands of the first year, student perceptions, expectations and success among others. A second layer of analysis revealed examples of Marcia's identity statuses from the student focus group data (Marcia, 1991).

The results will serve to educate the public about the academic, psychosocial challenges and demands of the Health and Human Services program. The results also affirmed the need for the community college to consider non-cognitive factors of success in accommodating students and knowing where they actually are psychosocially. These insights

hopefully will further participatory research with students and faculty to enhance program development, quality of education and student self realization.

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To my students past and present the opportunity to be entrusted with the sacred responsibility to engage others in reciprocal learning, awareness and growth has been the reason I embarked upon this journey of learning. I am better because of the struggle and this increased awareness and understanding will trickle down to future students. *"Life is lived forward, but understood backwards"!* Kierkegaard Soren

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Many students who are attracted to health and human service education and training are living the experiences of clients. In other words, human service education tends to attract many students who have had personal issues in their lives ranging from alcoholism, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, anger, estrangement from attachment figures (parents), mental illness and much more. Personal issues surface that are triggered by case scenarios introduced and examined as part of course work. Corey and Corey (2003) noted that: “students in human service programs sometimes bring up fears, resistances, perfectionist strivings, and other personal concerns” (p. 141). Learners are engaged with languages from pseudo counselling and social-psychological perspectives. When theories and concepts are simplified to enhance learners’ understanding, much of the course content and subsequent discussions resonate with them, resulting in multiple affects from anxiety, avoidance of certain classes, and resistance to reflective journaling processes, confessionals without understanding, to playing the “language game” and other behaviours of ethical and academic concern.

To illustrate these ideas, the photo monograph is a student assignment based on a visual representation of their learning and critical self reflection. Confessionals usually occur during the photo monograph presentation as a synthesis process and dimension of self awareness. This presentation is about making meaning of course content and aids faculty in determining students’ level of engagement in the personal growth and awareness course. Students who are not ready for such an intense and personal self exploration process attempt to mask their resistance, avoidance or indifference by inappropriate disclosures or remaining guarded about their social and cultural experiences. The “language game” refers therapeutically to the clients attempt to manipulate the counsellor by agreeing with much of what is discussed or mimicking the language that counsellors

and licensed mental health professionals use. Some students eventually pick up on faculty's delivery style and "big words" and begin to sound like the instructor rather than actually having understanding and insight on course content.

Health and human service education is distinct in several aspects from other program offerings within the Nova Scotia Community College. Although all professions have their challenges in terms of developing professional competencies and ethical practices, professionals with a health and human service designate encounter populations regularly who may be high risk or high maintenance depending on the client's social and developmental dispositions. High risk refers to individuals who are chronically dealing with life issues stemming from childhood and continuing into adolescence and potentially adulthood if early and effective interventions are absent. From physical and mental health issues to social alienation, there are no quick fix solutions or resolutions for severe cases facing human service professionals on a regular basis (Corey & Corey, 2003).

Helping implies resolving, recovery, healing, empowerment, reconciliation, justice and equality of treatment. Of course, the processes and difficulties in achieving such outcomes rest on the quality of the helping relationship and systems that implicitly mandate such beliefs, values and practices. Ethical standards followed by helping professionals, "while recognizing the basic rights of clients as set down in law, go beyond these rights to suggest broader guidelines in regard to human service worker-client relationships" (Mehr, 1980, p. 293).

What types of human service professionals are required to achieve such mandates and missions? In other words, highly skilled and ethical practitioners are required to effect measurable change in clients and human service consumers. The sensational cases of incompetence reported in the media, indifference towards and unethical practices reflect more than merely questionable or lacking credentials. Human service professionals' orientation to their work generally reflects

personal life experiences and many believe that they can relate to the “down trodden” of the world because of their past or current problems. Simplifying personal problems or institutional issues by stereotyping or over generalizing ought to be a red flag of caution for human service educators/practitioners who have field experience working with diverse client populations. Referencing the social evolution of human service work, its effectiveness and contradictions are relevant to this study. Paternalistic approaches to human needs although believed to be well intended, have not in numerous sited cases justly or effectively served those in need. In many cases, more harm than good has been caused. How can we insure that no harm will come to persons that human service professional have been entrusted to teach, care for, counsel or rehabilitate? How do we insure that clients and consumers are not victimized by societal attitudes and oppressive cultural practices? It is imperative that as a leader in post secondary education and skills development, the Nova Scotia Community College collaborate on social research and consider the issues and challenges identified in becoming a human service professional. Across the schools of the college, the need for engagement in applied research is acknowledged, recognized and supported (NSCC, 2000). Applied research in the school of Health and Human Service is currently being supported and hopefully will encourage the growth of made in Nova Scotia research that has national and international relevance.

Much needs to be considered in our education and skills development of human service learners. Marianne Schneider Corey, licensed marriage and family therapist and consultant along with her husband Gerald Corey, Professor Emeritus of Human Services at California State University, Fullerton California are well known in the field of human service education and practice. They are the authors of several publications examining ethics, case approaches to counselling and group processes. They co-authored the text, *Becoming a Helper*, 4th ed (2003).

The preface of *Becoming a Helper* poses several relevant questions for human service educators' consideration when developing curriculum, course design, methods of delivery and addressing the ongoing questions of validity and reliability of assessments and evaluations of human service education and skill development. *Becoming a Helper* concentrates on the problems involved in becoming an effective helper and the personal difficulties in working with others. The text addresses such subject matters as motives for becoming a helper, the value of self exploration, understanding life transitions, dealing with difficult clients, managing boundary issues, understanding special populations and so on. How are skills and occupational education differentiated and what processes are utilized to achieve course and program outcomes while also satisfying the needs of industry?

The struggles, anxieties and uncertainties of helpers are well documented (Berk, 2007; Corey & Corey, 2003; Santrock, MacKenzie-Rivers, Leung & Malcomson, 2005). To what degree do human service students explore in depth the demands and strains of the helping profession? Do they consider their motives for seeking a career in the helping profession? These questions are the foundation of Personal Growth and Awareness and Interpersonal Insights course work. These are foundational courses in the first semester of studies for first year students. In essence, these courses which are co requisites to *Becoming a Helper* as well as *Helping Applications* examine, unpack and peel back the personal motives and needs for helping. Students are challenged to think authentically in assessing what they will get from their studies and work in the field of human services. Self directed and self regulated behaviours are expectations upon entering core human services programs and students are challenged daily to take a proactive stance in their education and professional development.

Emphasis on the importance of human service professionals self awareness and critical reflection on their families of origin and attachments can trigger many unpleasant memories and unresolved issues that affect current interpersonal relationships at home, work and in the community. Merely intellectualizing course work and regurgitating what has been transmitted or read will not achieve ethical and knowledge competence plus integrity desired of human service professionals. Conative learning must be nurtured and experienced by learners to ensure that key issues identified through course work and service learning are the essential developmental processes of becoming an authentic helper. In other words, it is the challenge of human service educators to insure that cognition and emotion are conjoint processes in the education and skill development of human service professionals.

Focusing on how earlier relationships continue to influence the quality of current and future relationships and how learners are dealing with life transitions and human service education have presented various challenges, anxieties, avoidances and resistant behaviours to personal growth and interpersonal processes. The immediacy by which students must immerse themselves in these critical reflective and self examination processes leaves many feeling unsupported and helpless. Interpersonal communications in “relating to others” is a comprehensive matter to examine and foreign to how many of us have been socialized to interact. Perhaps many of us who have not experienced crisis on a scale equivalent to client populations studied or have done little self confronting personal growth work, fail to appreciate the relevance of the argument made that “helpers” must engage in their own wellness before attempting to help those with specific needs. Human service educators and practitioners’ work is about engaging the learner or client and demonstrating authentic regard to those who need help or care.

Personal growth and awareness focuses on the personal traits and strengths that enable helpers to be effective and ethical regardless of the nature of the work environment. Because human service professionals ask their clients to examine their behaviours to understand themselves more fully, human service educators ask learners to be equally committed to an awareness of their own lives. Without a high level of self awareness, potential helpers may obstruct clients' wellbeing, especially when these clients are struggling with issues the learner has avoided facing. Forming a sense of ethical awareness and learning to resolve personal troubles are challenges facing all students of human service education.

Experiences of faculty and students over the past decade substantiate the concerns and claims made regarding the distinctive nature and challenges of human service education. The human service profession historically attracts learners dealing with past or current troubles in their lives. Those learners who authentically engage in self examination and self awareness work, experience fewer difficulties with their studies and course requirements (Corey & Corey, 2003). On the other hand, learners who are in the health and human services program solely as a means to an end or who experience frequent episodes of negative transference triggered by course material, discussions and other learning processes are engaged for the most part at an intellectual level. They generally are not comfortable engaging in critical reflection and deconstruction processes. It may not be the lack of ability or willingness to engage but rather, their struggles and resistance may reflect culture shock and transition anxiety that in many cases are immediately experienced.

Motivating students' psychosocial and academic readiness are issues of ongoing concern. Such issues can be problematic to insuring the quality of human service graduates (Corey & Corey, 2003). The college's reputation and relationship with human service sectors, professionals and communities are reciprocally impacted by various levels of organizational culture also. My research

will examine these issues and arguments that human service education and skill development is distinct for reasons identified and that program and course delivery must assess the motivations and readiness of learners who wish to pursue such professions. These issues have far reaching personal and cultural ethical implications as well as their societal ramification for social transformation.

Psychosocial Readiness Defined

Psychosocial readiness refers to the growth promoting qualities and associated achievements that reflect the students' developmental readiness to engage in self regulated learning at the post secondary education level (Corey & Corey, 2003). Caring behaviours reflect regard for others and belief in one's abilities to achieve goals they have autonomously made. Demonstrated autonomy, demands for more choice and assertiveness in expressing general and specific needs are significant behaviours in identifying self regulated learners.

Psychosocial readiness reflects one's abilities to initiate and organize activities around chosen goals. Being centered or grounded is not about an arrival at some maturation end but rather, authentic awareness of the potentialities of lived experiences. The person is able to articulate meaningfully the limits of independence and the constant push-pull of human ecologies. In essence, it is more helpful to consider ones' psychosocial readiness across developmental periods of the life cycle (Adler, 1935; Erikson, 1963; Marcia, 1980). Resourceful students tend to be more vocal and assertive than passive unintentional learners. They have the ability to engage in and foster authentic work relationships compared to working in isolation or avoiding collaborative processes.

Psychosocial readiness implies caring for others and a focus on occupational achievement and creativeness. These students are receptive to working with and teaching others rather than a self absorbed pursuit of goals and achievement. The cumulative effect of developing these qualities of

self is academic competence and social integrity that can be further refined and developed through new and diverse experiences (Corey & Corey, 2003).

Developmental Context of Readiness

The developmental context of readiness refers to the unintended and formalized achievement of psychosocial milestones during critical sensitive periods of cumulative physical growth and social emotional learning. Degrees of growth are further influenced during increased societal challenges, direct/indirect experiences and relational expectations. Personality types, temperamental constitutions, innate preferences and interests, influence psychosocial readiness and activity levels as well as human ecological affects (Corey & Corey, 2003; Erikson, 1963).

The psychosocial dichotomies of trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt premises the perspective that age appropriate stages of development are critical to human development and achievement. This theoretical perspective the work of Erik Erikson (1959) assumes hierarchal development across chronological periods. This theoretical framework in understanding human development dynamics is well known and helpful but is not as clear and predictable chronologically as implied because multiple factors determine psychosocial achievement. For example, the life and times of the individual will impact how they perceive self and the social meaning they make of situations, experiences, decision making and the choices they act upon. Stages and corresponding qualities and activities can be interpreted generally or specifically within the context and societal and cultural influences. Unlike Erikson's (1963) birth to old age timeline of critical development with opposing possibilities, these dichotomies can be experienced during childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The cumulative social history of childhood will generally influence continued growth or struggle during specific challenges of adolescence and adulthood.

Persons vary in perceiving and internalizing experiences during the critical periods of childhood through the challenging years of adolescence.

Reviewing student graduate profiles in terms of developmental readiness, I have found it interesting that in most cases, student achievement has been a result of many learners experiencing the challenges of decision making and eventually conscious choice to make monumental changes in their life. For each individual, the process of change occurs at many levels from established career change to self identifying the need for personal change concerning varied basic maintenance and wellness needs associated with living.

Developmental readiness also reflects healthy self regard along with general and specific passions and interests known to self. Each period of life is characterized by a distinct developmental challenge (Erikson, 1950). These life span challenges present pathways of experiences that impact the ebb and flow of potentiality, self achievement, setback, disappointment and resiliency. There are critical periods of whole development across time that cumulatively contribute to negative or positive outcomes. For example, consider the quality and responsiveness significant for establishing trust between the individual and significant persons from childhood to young adult. Failure to establish trusting and respectful relationships can result in weakened autonomy of self, fear, doubt, mistrust and other psycho social inhibitions.

Also, the context of development needs to be considered. Issues of developmental readiness reflect perennial concerns across decades, influenced by economic and political forces impacting the life and times of individuals.

Marcia's Identity Statuses

It appears that from a Western European cultural point of view that there has always been a preoccupation with the nature of childhood and adolescence, how to relate to youth and their social value. The diversity of viewpoints are endless and the language of making sense of non adults has resulted in a proliferation of developmental studies on various subject matters pertaining to youth from cognition, psychomotor skills, language development and of course ego identity/self awareness.

In my examination of student achievement and success within the context of post secondary adult education, I have referenced the work of James Marcia (1966, 1980, 1991) who hypothesized that resolution of life challenges during youth development involved more than the resolve of psychosocial tensions between externally influenced social and cultural development and internal perceptions of sense of worth and place. Marcia believed that individuals experience a more diverse pattern of identity struggle, exploration and discovery than previously assumed. In turn, this struggle impacted upon whether the youth or young adult accepted normative expectations, resisted cultural impositions or denounced contradictory messages and actions of authority figures as only possibly knowing what was best for self and not others.

Marcia found evidence of four "statuses of being" in the context of youth development. They are *identity achievement* where the individual is engaged in vocations of interest and exhibits behaviours of civic involvement without expected recognition or reward. *Foreclosure identity* is expressed by individuals in the sense of adherence to social conventions and expectations of others without critical reflection or questioning. The defining psychological movement of individuals reflective of *diffusion identity* is the lack of sustainable commitment or exploration to any particular life tasks as defined by dominant social cultural norms. Persons experiencing *moratorium* may not

be in a conative or physiological state to attend to external expectations and societal norms. Their actions are about settled choice and deciding on their own terms, not while under duress (Arnett, 2007; Lerner, Brown & Kier, 2007).

Marcia's statuses are not fixed or static but are psycho social dispositions that are identifiable in the shared narratives of relationship building. All identity statuses are significant in my attempt to understand determinants of student achievement and success; however, foreclosure and moratorium identity have been most pronounced with human service students struggling with transition and authentic engagement. To a lesser degree those exhibiting diffusion statuses usually experience difficulty with self exploration processes of human service education and either exit from the program or attempt to survive the academic and critical reflective rigors by straddling moratoria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of stakeholders of the School Health and Human Services through focus groups. Three focus groups consisting of a) second year health and human services students, b) faculty, and c) support personnel and academic chairs examined students' motivations and their psychosocial, interpersonal and academic readiness for enrolling in human service education and training at the Truro campus of the NSCC. Also examined were expectations of post secondary education in general, adult learning principles and approaches to transformative learning (E.g., learner- centered).

The student focus group was asked to compare their experiences of first year within the program with their initial assumptions, expectations and perceptions of the demands of the work place. Students were encouraged to discuss what they found easiest and most difficult in their studies, and the effectiveness of available supports.

Faculty, student support personnel and administrators were encouraged to discuss their views on the program's ability to meet students' expectations and the program's relevance for meeting workplace demands, the challenges and demands of the program and the availability of supports for students. These groups were also asked to comment on the effectiveness of the admissions process, and changes that have occurred in adult learner typologies over the past four decades.

Significance of the Study

To date, within the Nova Scotia Community College and specifically the School of Health and Human Services, there has not been internal research conducted on the typology of learners who apply to the human services program. Human service education is distinct and is not vocational in nature. First year studies emphasize the themes of personal growth, self awareness and readiness to being ethical and competent with helping others. This qualitative research sought to understand from the learners' perspective how the program, courses of study, evaluations and the philosophy of human service education and skill development are experienced and generally understood. Documenting the learners' experiences could lead to significant insight and awareness and ultimately, educate the college and public about the academic, psychosocial challenges and demands of the Health and Human Services program.

Far too often energy is spent complaining about the types of learners we have to deal with from year to year. We take far too much credit or assume credit for the success of students who are ready for new learning and who can claim demonstratively that indeed they are self regulated and directed in their learning. In other words, students who arrive academically ready and are self regulated in their learning will be successful whether I am competent or not. Through the participatory and collaborative approach of this research, I hope to achieve consensus among a

majority of faculty and student support/ administration participants for the significance of this study.

Hopefully, this inquiry will help us to better understand how learning is experienced and just what determines student success. In terms of access and institutional accountability, we might consider enrolment management practices and hopefully understand more clearly student success in the context of admission processes. The college might be encouraged to rethink the admission process and appropriate developmental placement of learners from a psychosocial/ scholastic readiness perspective.

Broad social, economic and political changes also impact students' academic and psychosocial readiness. Over time, greater emphasis has been placed on linking education to economic performance (Dorion, 2005). Economic needs and education may have been more black and white in previous generations in terms of upgrading, correspondence, specific training and duration of training related to program offerings during the last century. Courses and training were directly related to industry needs and the window of training and upgrading was shorter in duration than at present. In comparison, the current standard is that all students who enter core programs within the community college must have a minimal grade 12 or equivalent (NSCC, 2009). First year foundation courses require a degree of knowledge and literacy competencies.

Investigating what "readiness" means and how one identifies learning and student success beyond institutional and economic needs to valuing the voices of all stakeholders should positively impact the academic plan of the college. This study can be a catalyst for clearer understanding of geographic location, age, program interest, real choice, educational intent and authentic desire to improve life chances. Focus groups enable us to examine successes and difficulties through multiple

lenses and not merely a single view or perspective imposed as a solution to this ongoing challenge (Wibeck, Dahlgren, & Öberg, 2007).

I have deliberated on the moral, ethical, humanistic and societal impact of personal troubles as inhibitors to success and achievement. When students are constantly dealing with financial, relational and mental health stressors in their private lives, how is it possible for them to manage the demands of education and remain positive about life in general? In my observations, some have developed effective strategies of resilience while others have negative coping strategies to rely on.

Through the literature review and the shared experiences of focus group participants, I hope to identify and understand psychosocial and academic readiness through the perspectives of student participants, the impact of previous students on my position in the research and the experiences and perspectives of faculty, management and student services. The relevance of the findings could help all stakeholders re-examine the business of education in order to assess how well education works for the individual learner.

My Position in the Research

My interest in student psychosocial and academic readiness is the result of a decade and a half of facilitating learning and growth in the discipline of human services as a community college instructor. During this time I had the privilege of engaging individuals and immersed myself in student narratives of life experiences shared through course assignments. The nature of courses and interactive exchanges between faculty and students resulted in transformative experiences for some students and resistance to growth and learning for others. I wondered why an individual would choose human services as a preferred program of study yet exhibit little internal locus of control to take advantage of the quality of education they could experience. Although most students needed time to transition from passive socialization and compliant learner to collaborative

learner, many did not see the relevance of personal growth processes and the study of engagement dynamics in their education.

Core programs within the Nova Scotia Community College are not designed to support remedial or developmental education. Students who are accepted into core programs are expected to be ready to engage in occupational education and skill development. With the short window of two years to complete over twenty course requirements, there is little developmental time afforded individuals who need it. Certainly accommodating learning styles and disabilities reflect equitable education and student centeredness. However, in my experience, a significant percentage of students encountered academic and psychosocial challenges that if ignored would place them at a significant disadvantage compared with students who had prepared themselves somewhat for the realities of post secondary education. It has never been my approach to forward anecdotal explanations for why a student might succeed or struggle. I based my premise for student success upon the valued experiences and observations I was privy to over the years and began to focus on psycho social development in my attempt to understand the consistencies of faked engagements with self awareness processes and academic struggles. I started to develop a student case management approach to education in order to examine whether there was a relationship between the Erikson's psycho social identity theory and transformative learning and goal attainment compared to instrumental or "means to ends" education.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development in actuality reflects diverse lived experiences of individuals. Developmental theories some times are accurate representations of individual life cycles. Often times, I wondered how theories and perspectives could benefit the student and practitioner unless both were able to identify with and relate to research that tries to make sense of individuals and the human experience in general. Occupational education is about applied learning

and this awareness helped me to realize that the formation of concepts or constructs and theorizing derives from the lived experiences of individual theorists. I concluded that psychology, socially and other disciplines merely reflected each learner's experiences and understanding beyond research design.

A significant turning point question was when someone asked me in my second year of teaching: Is testing an art or a science? I was gaining a greater understanding of subject matters but were the students learning? The test and measurements course I studied as part of the Community College Education Program for new faculty was perhaps the most valued and beneficial academic learning I had experienced because I had not considered validity and reliability in assessing student learning prior to that course. I was creating instruments to test students' knowledge of course work oblivious to how learning was assessed. Research on grade inflation and social passing caused me to step back and examine my knowledge competence of courses I had been assigned to teach, effectiveness of methods of delivery and instruments designed to assess learning. I began to consider the learning process as developmental. It was not about the "bells and whistles" of course delivery and the command of rhetoric but rather, it is about making the connection with the whole person. Content was now examined for understanding not to merely transmit words or language. Learning needed to be accessible and a good fit with the learners' constitution in order for it to be permeable. The movement away from multiple guessing, test cramming, regurgitating from textbooks and student parroting, to making meaning significantly impacted the learning environment of students. Inadvertently we continue to condition students to perform for the base reward of passing or actually integrating several dimensions of learning in order to control for student compliance and appeasement. The multitude of questions and reflections regarding student engagement and learning along with further course work impacted how I experienced the

students and how they would experience me. I was fostering transformative learning through approaches, modeling and evaluations without realizing or labelling the process as such.

For me, understanding students' beliefs and learning processes has become an important component of academic achievement. The most important aspect of this relationship is the idea that epistemological beliefs may influence how students perceive and process information and ideas and may subsequently impact how the student engages in an activity (Schreiber, & Shinn, 2003).

It was anecdotal evidence of student readiness being revealed through reflective journaling, shared narratives of life experiences, connecting with course content and through the photo monograph synthesis work that led me to conclude that the progressive ideals, accommodations and educational approaches could not be realized by a significant percent of students because their actual developmental readiness was not known. My concern rested with those learners who made minimal effort or who exited the college without accomplishing the goals they had set out to achieve. How did Erikson's theoretical framework on identity development and Marcia's achievement statuses apply to those learners I was most concerned with and to learners in general? Imposing dispositional categories on persons or labelling them is not helpful if our intent is to understand the reflective and projected self. The two year window of the human services diploma does not lend well to exploratory or developmental time. The academic expectations, pace of processing and the volume of encoded information would overwhelm those learners not ready to engage in critical reflection or to develop self awareness. This situation compounds the difficulties of struggling learners in their efforts to realize their hopes and wishes.

I concluded that most learners could not make meaning of new ideas because there was simply not the time or space in the program afforded for valid inquiry. Students who had not arrived at the college with a conscious personal resolve for personal growth and career pursuit were

especially affected. The engagement process that stretches and taxes the imagination cannot be appreciated by those who have not already considered some of these issues well before applying to programs within the college. I found myself asking many learners what it was that they wanted since their struggle to engage in discussion or self direct their learning was absent. Likewise, far too much time was being spent on life coaching rather than getting to the heart of course content and process learning.

It was the result of these diverse and cumulative experiences with students over the past decade, I decided to investigate historically vocational/occupational education, its gender specificity, the economic and political context of education and just how social cultural forces inhibited and enhanced children's, youth's and adults' participation in society. Building on this, I would attempt to understand personal disclosures and shared experiences of students past and present that might reflect Erikson's psychosocial identity theory as well as Marcia's status achievement theory. Application of these theoretical frameworks might help us better understand the significance of readiness and student success. The college might use the findings to continue to influence student preparedness, developmental education and inter agency/institution accountability.

C H A P T E R I I

Literature Review

This literature reviews consists of five major sections. The first section reviews the history of vocational education followed by a section that explores adult education including the influences of economic demands, modernity and development, and modernity and education. The third section addresses the economic and political context of community college, transition to a college system, student trends and student readiness and resourcefulness. The fourth section addresses psychosocial readiness, key theories and early and current research. Community college research and practice are explored in the fifth and final section of this review.

Vocational Learning Historically

Universally early cultures depended on the land and natural resources for their sustenance. Learning was the consequence of individual and cultural needs to utilize natural and human resources to meet ongoing sustenance and to sustain and maintain distinct cultural patterns of existence. At the time of European contact with indigenous peoples of the Western hemisphere, European social patterns reflected establishing settlements, claiming sovereignty, ownership and control of the rich and abundant natural endowment. Frontier society eked out subsistence and was more preoccupied with survival than formal education. However forms of education were introduced through apprenticeships and vocations.

Although vocational technical instruction had been present throughout the French, British and aboriginal historic wars and conflicts, vocational learning for sustenance rested in the hands of familial teaching or private and would not begin to become state sponsored until after confederation. An excerpt from Professor Glendenning's work (1964, p. 14-15) identifies guilds instruction in St Joachim and Quebec City in 1688 by Bishop Laval offering practical vocational

learning in various guilds as well as agricultural instruction on experimental farms. Schools in Beupre trained girls in domestic skills.

Nova Scotia's early efforts in technical education were directed towards the occupational needs and interests of adults, while manual training, mechanical science and industrial arts were considered as general subjects in the course of studies of secondary education (MacLeod, 1986-7). In 1884, the desire and urgency to introduce technical education into the school curriculum was first mentioned. The Superintendent wrote:

Nova Scotia's school system and methods should be in sympathy with the spirit of the age (i.e. industrialization), and that so far as this can be done without endangering higher interests, encouragement should be given to studies which train the eye and hand and thus create favourable dispositions towards industrial pursuits generally (MacLeod, 1986-7, p.17).

Vocational training started in Nova Scotia in 1872 with the Halifax Marine School. The Minery School was started in 1888 which became T.U.N.S. The beginning of the 20th century agriculture education was carried out in Truro as a part of the Normal College (MacLeod, 1986-7).

Despite the inevitable reality and need to respond to the societal impact of industrialization, much of rural Canada and in particular the Maritimes was still an agricultural society not fully participating in a wage economy. Schooling was only compulsory for children under the age of 12. Even into the first two decades of the twentieth century approximately only 1/3 of youth attended school on a regular base.

Vocational Gender Stratification

Separate sphere ideology within systemic patriarchy dictated learning along gender lines. From a gender perspective, advances in industrialization – which demanded large inexpensive labour pools – increasing importance of the family wage economy provided some women with the opportunity to participate if only temporary in work in the public sphere. In 1891 the majority of Halifax's industrial women were young and unmarried. In the tailoring and garment making sector, 41% were under 20 yrs of age with 68% under 25 yrs of age. In the cotton industry, 75% of women in factories were aged 20 or under and fully 94% were under 25 yrs of age (Black, Mitchinson, Cuthbert, Light, Bourne & Prentice, 1998). These facts are important to support arguments that in an agrarian and mixed economy, the needs of youth were subordinated to economic realities and simple occupational requisites allowed youth to be integrated rapidly into adult productivity.

Within the general population in Canada, urban and rural were relatively poor. Many youth had to forego secondary education in order to help sustain the family and their own survival. Young girls would find work as domestics and in the garment industry in particular, while males would be apprenticed to agricultural labour, factory work and resource based economic activities. The developmental significance of these social, economic and political realities was that employment and unemployment were lived experiences for many youth. Social stratification based on ethnicity, class, race, gender, mental illness and disabilities compounded the hardships and life chances for minorities. Further, the periods of childhood and adolescence were of shorter duration. In essence children and youth were an economic asset to family and industry. In our attempt to identify typologies of adolescent and young adult cohorts across time, it is critical to illustrate the nature of economics at historical periods and the variation of opportunities, work and vocations.

Attitude towards the Child

The manner in which children and youth experienced education, work and leisure reflected the spirit of the times and certainly for several centuries up until the introduction of bills in Provincial and State legislatures as well as Parliaments and Congress to restrict the age and hours that children could work, children and youth were part of the economic unit of the family (Synnott, 1983). This experience was their lot in life, particularly for the white under class as well as other marginalized populations.

Recapitulation theory perpetuated by scientists during the 19th and early part of the 20th century likened non European races to infants, children and youth in their evolutionary climb from primitive, to savage group and finally to civilized society. Recapitulation theory offered an irresistible way to rank people from every social class, race, and gender (Lesko, 2001, p.34). The nature of the economy consisted predominantly of work requiring labour intensive methods and a large work force. For this reason, children and youth participated fully. In contrast, industry and manufacturing required a more skilled labour force.

Classical education for the critical mass of the population did not exist. Prior to the establishment of industrial schools in the mid 19th century, (1850's) vocational education was the responsibility of individual craftsmen. The affluent child usually received instruction at the hand of a governess or tutor. The type of social experiences and quality of opportunity controls the type of learning and context by which it is valued. Speaking of European immigrants, survival, working the land and caring for the household also took precedence over education even though schooling mattered to this group. Axelrod (1997) noted that: "When there was time, and resources allowed, youth might attend a common, private or denominational school in the area" (p.3). Learning and the development of moral character was through work rather than specialty curriculums and classical education (grammar schools) reserved for principally affluent young male youth and fewer females.

In essence we are shaped by our histories as much by our genetic makeup and this is no less true of the baby boomer, smaller bust generation, echo generation, Xers or millenniums. Alternating cycles of bust–boom-bust create enormous fluctuations in demographics affecting all aspects of society from immigration, health care, housing construction, social equilibrium and certainly education at all levels.

Adult Education

In the historical context of defining adult education and adult learners, the chronological definition is between the ages of 18-30. This definition may have been both sociologically accurate and developmentally significant in the first half of the twentieth century through World War I and World War II and the front end of the baby boom from 1947 to 1957. However the increasing regularity of school attendance experienced by Canadian children and adolescents since the 1950's inadvertently has constructed and shaped a new type of age cohort even though formal schooling had been mandatory by law early into the 20th century.

Since the onset of industrialization in North America, particularly in the United States, aspects of social, political and economic currents have significantly shaped work and education in modern North American society. Noticeable challenges faced are demographic shifts in the diversity of learners currently attending post secondary education. The nature and social readiness of learners creates a daunting task to facilitate reciprocal communications, nature and purpose of training in order that graduates are competitive and prepared to enter the labour market. Great expectations, industry demands, demographic trends and civic consciousness drives curriculum development and approaches to acquiring understanding and assessing learning.

Economic Demands

Vocational/technical education historically had been brief in terms of the length of time and content specific knowledge needed in training and upgrading. Following this model, the Human Service Diploma program provides a two year window normatively speaking to acquire knowledge competencies in twenty or more courses (NSCC Calendar, 2007-2008). Learners lagging in psychosocial resources make it extremely challenging to deliver human service education and basic skills development without triggering abnormally high levels of stress, anxiety, absenteeism, disengagement and significant levels of exiting the program. Psychosocial regression can also manifest as a result of expected self confrontation, controlled confrontation, methods of content delivery and assessing valid learning.

Historically, children and youth were expected to participate in the economic life of the society to which they were born. Schooling occurred around work particularly in rural society rather than work around schooling. The nature of social ecologies in which we are born and the social, political and economic dynamics of our time have a tremendous impact upon the dynamics of individual psychosocial readiness. Students must make the transition from the insular and segregated world of childhood and adolescence into adult learning and more intense adult scrutiny. In past centuries childhood and adolescence were shorter periods in duration and thus expectations, adjustments and adaptations to accept the demands of the adult world was perhaps less difficult or taken for granted. Work had been the dominant principle and experience in the life of many children and youth whether rural, urban or early city life of North America (Synnott, 1983). In essence, critical and sensitive periods of development of youth are influenced and altered by the socio-cultural, political and economic currents of a given time.

Modernity and Development

As the nature of economics and social conventions change so too do the methods and nature of how we conduct the business of education and work. Our views, treatment and expectations of children and youth also change. In terms of child exploitation from a North American perspective, societies and legislation evolved to protect the intended well being of children and youth. However in our struggles to correct injustices and advance children's rights, we have created new challenges of no less concern. It is my opinion that a new, yet softer or subtle type of exploitation has emerged incrementally since the last half of the 20th century. Children and youth have evolved from little workers to little consumers. At least from a North American perspective youth are no longer producers and contributors to family sustainability. A significant portion of disposable family income is directly spent on children and youth. For youth who do work mainly in retail, grocery or fast foods, their earnings are spent on themselves.

Advances in technologies in mechanization, production, harvesting and manufacturing are in response to proficiency, productivity, profitability and competition. While primary to twelve and more especially post secondary education emphasize and recognize the relationship between literacy and quality of life, the providing and delivering of education is a business. Increasingly it is consumer driven and most educational institutions recognize that their sustainability and survival rest upon regular strategic planning, external intelligence, governmental lobbying and accountability to stakeholders and in some cases shareholders. John Dennison (1996) speaks to some of these issues in his book *Challenges and opportunity: Canada's community colleges at the crossroads*. The labour force that sustained economic activities in the 18th century was for the most part "unskilled" or "semi-skilled".

Modernity and Education

In Western democracies, regular education has become a reality for all since the advent of public schooling. Despite this reality, differentiated education remains to reproduce existing social strata with its negative and positive consequences. Emphasis on science and technical education has been given priority cyclically over time and currently in order to respond to competitive political and economic systems as well as global environmental concerns. Countries achieving advancements and breakthroughs in areas of science and new technologies have decidedly political leverage and competitive advantage (Karier, Violas & Spring 1973).

In 1957 Sputnik orbiting of the earth intensified the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union and sped up the space race resulting in a new agency created in the United States, N.A.S.A. (Palladino, 1996). The cold war and arms race between the former USSR and the USA caused the United States to rethink and examine the state of affairs of education in America and to allocate greater funding in the area of pure and applied sciences in order to maintain its position of influence on the world stage and to ensure its' economic, political and military dominance in the world. Certainly formal schooling would prove a crucial incubator in developing the minds of the brightest learners to further advance the economic superiority of sovereign nations.

Community College: Economic and Political Context

The literature reviewed that reflects current Community College issues related to psychosocial readiness and student success are within a political, economic and socio cultural context. Within this section of the literature my personal thoughts and reflections are integrated with ideas from the literature.

The NSCC (2000) adopted the following mission statement, building Nova Scotia's economy and quality of life through education and innovation. According to the college's vision:

... our approach to education will be one that engages Nova Scotians to seek out new ways to apply knowledge and skills to the real world. We will integrate our education with community building and economic development. The College experience will change lives by creating an attitude of confidence, reflection, and self-reliance. We will challenge people to make use of what they learn for their own benefit and for the benefit of us all (p.8).

Community Colleges' predecessor (Vocational Education/Regional Vocational High Schools) existed to meet a diversity of economic and social needs among blue and pink collar workers. The NSCC currently exists to respond to a diversity of social needs and expectations of Nova Scotians and industry. Both external and internal demands are placed upon the college to provide relevant education and skills development for an ever changing economy and demographic that extends well beyond the Province of Nova Scotia (NSCC, 2000).

The external demands of the NSCC are driven by the decline of traditional economies in Nova Scotia and elsewhere across Canada and abroad. The new economy reflects the importance of intellectual capital, new agriculture businesses, forest management, ecotourism, information technologies and many other economic strategies to revitalize weak economies. The government's role in economic development and fiscal accountability has placed more pressure on education and training institutions to increase access to a growing number of Nova Scotians who need upgrading, retraining and specializations in order to pursue gainful employment in a growing economic mosaic. With individuals experiencing three or four career changes across their life span, we can expect to be engaged in training and upgrading throughout our life time.

Besides being influenced by new and recycled ideas, environmental sustainability, industry restructuring and government agenda's, how has the NSCC responded to an ever changing student demographic and social dynamic? What does the college have to say about learners who pay their money to attend the college in anticipation and hope that their experience will be unlike any other learning experience? Responses to these questions are captured both implicitly and explicitly in the mission, vision and values of the college as well as supporting literature. For example, O'Banion, (1997) claimed that: "The learning college defines the role of learning facilitators by the needs of the learners" (p. 57) (See also O'Banion, 2003). Similarly, Dennison, (1996) noted that the primary purpose of colleges was to serve the needs of students and to meet the common expectation of a high quality education.

Transition to a College Education System

Since the transition from a regional vocational high school education system to a college education system, programs have become standardized within schools as well as curriculum. The Nova Scotia Community College espouses the principles of strength based learning/management and service learning, portfolio learning, self expectations, intrinsic motivation, developmental readiness and prior learning recognition (NSCC, 2000). With the expanding diversity of programs and the increasing fiscal and social pressure to increase student enrolment across programs, the college is experiencing a widening gulf between the types of learners being accepted. The increasing demands of industry and educational consumers on programs raises concerns over student achievement and the widening definition of student success. The social and political imperative to increase student access is generally supported, yet the process of accepting applicants does not entirely reflect the declared values and actual practices of the college. Nor is the policy impact upon the learner in terms of human resources and real time needed to support their learning fully considered. "Whether to attend a post- secondary education institution, which one to attend and

how to complete its degree or diploma requirements, are extraordinary complex decisions that are faced by millions of Canadian high school graduates and those transitioning to post-secondary education” (Mueller, 2008, p.5). In some ways, we are merely experiencing a new cycle as it relates to the forces that are setting and dictating the agenda for education, skill development and skill enhancement in Nova Scotia.

Nova Scotia Community College makes it possible for the critical mass of Nova Scotians to combine academic studies with practical methods of delivery, diverse methods of evaluating learning, skill development and personal growth. More Nova Scotians have graduated from high school over the past two decades than at any other time in the Province’s history. Graduates out of economic necessity are continuing their education at the post secondary level as well as receiving education and skill development through private business of education. Some of the reasons for more Nova Scotians engaging in continuous education and training are the result of educational inequities being addressed in the primary to 12 system, the availability of student aid to community college students, the new reality of the necessity to receive the training and education to compete in the new yet smaller economy, efforts to provide greater access to historically disadvantaged groups, displaced workers in mid life career transitions as well as mothers of young adult children who now have the possibility of returning to school after years of putting formal learning on hold for a variety of reasons (NSCC, 2000).

The colleges’ mandate is to provide quality education and skills development to meet today’s labour market demands. There has been a rigorous program renewal process which resulted in a major overhaul of the Colleges core academic offerings between 1994 and 2001. To emphasize this point, 48 percent of the programs offered in the fall of 2001 did not exist in 1997 (NSCC, 2000).

Student Trends

So then, what types of learners does the college attract? Demographics of students vary due to the diversity of programming as well as gender shifts in terms of traditional gender occupational changes. From the general graduate survey statistics that the NSCC has conducted since 1999, programs of tourism and hospitality management, office information technology, library and information technology, health and human services remain predominantly female. The school of trades and technology on the other hand remains predominantly male. Programs such as applied arts and new media, information technology reflect an equal mix of female to male. Applied arts, new media and information technology programs are non gender specific seeing that the general population is socialized to adapt to current trends in technology reflective of the youth culture as social consumers of these technologies and the post modern secondary schools that are high tech. What is interesting regarding gender ratio and programs is that in the applied/new media and information technology programs, age cohorts among male and female reflect a younger population which supports the perspective that some programs reflect a particular gender and age cohort due to life experiences, education and degrees of social learning. Women and men are increasingly pursuing non-traditional fields of study and training which enhances their competitiveness, employability and empowerment. With economic change and government deinstitutionalization occurring, many employees have been displaced from what was once considered secure employment. Higher professional standards and stricter government regulations have also forced people back to the traditional classroom, online or other learning arenas. This has resulted in a mosaic of students from recent high school graduates, young single adult parents, HRDC sponsored clients, community service clients, adult high school students, personal life transition students, learning challenged and many others. It is challenging to provide quality attention to individual

needs with large numbers in each class and limited developmental and mental health expertise to accurately address high end needs of a percentage of the student population.

The college's acceptance of any student who meets the minimal requirements for entrance without a thorough program evaluation process for appropriate placement can result in causing more harm to the learner than supporting them. The college ought not to assume that its values and practices of themselves can address complex developmental issues that a segment of our student population faces. "Institutional accountability as well as revenue considerations led post secondary institutions to concern themselves with retention and graduation rates: it is one thing to admit students; it is another to ensure that they make reasonable progress towards graduation" (Mueller, 2008, p.6). In terms of occupational education, enrolment is positively related to cost, duration and improved employment opportunities for graduates.

Student Readiness/Resourcefulness

Determining whether students are socially and emotionally resourceful to work in the field is certainly an ethical issue and perhaps a human rights matter. The human service program is challenging enough for those who are prepared and not a good experience for those who for whatever reason thought the experience was going to be something quite different than it actually is.

Much of the time frustrations over students are due to interpersonal and program readiness issues. First of all the college is about occupational education and skills development for adult learners which assumes students are self directed and self regulated in their learning. Adult learning is generally voluntary and intentional as well as essential in order for one to be gainfully employed. Fast foods and retail industries may be great for youth who generally only have themselves to be concerned with. However, the adult world of rent, mortgages, transportation, and other demand

requires more than a minimum wage to sustain multiple needs and interests. Normative developmental processes present challenges in terms of work ethic, intrinsic motivation, critical thinking and other factors which may predict or influence actual outcomes for student success. The classical “mature” learner with a sense of perspective leading to sounder judgements about one’s self and others may present fewer behavioural concerns but also have his/her share of educational challenges and external stressors that can create distractions from their goal of achieving and being successful. Over the years, I observed those who demonstrate a degree of psychosocial wellness, adaptability and resilience usually fare well and achieve despite the multi tasking required.

Core programming facilitates at the analysis, critically reflective, application, synthesis and applied acquisition levels of learning. Despite the section on applications for applicants to disclose whether they have a learning disability or special need, accommodating meetings each June for incoming students are not a broad enough process to facilitate accommodations for students with psycho social transitional challenges. A percentage of the population receiving access to the college need a foundation or transition year in order for both the student and college staff to identify cognitive and interpersonal domains that needed attention. By identifying areas in which the student lags and ecological stressors that contributed to the learner’s present disposition, a transition or foundational year could be spent working to address the experiential gaps that a significant percentage of students in first and second year core programs struggle with. The level of psycho social resourcefulness of high school graduate cohorts and first year students in general is essential to determine in order for orientation processes to reflect developmental dimensions of transition, engagement and sense of place. Consistent with the theories of Erikson (1968), Ochberg (1986) and Marcia (1966) on identity development and the life task of high school graduates in particular, the variation in transitional struggle for those who attend post secondary institutions reflects the students’ sense of well being.

How do we build and enhance Nova Scotia's economy and quality of life if we are not fully committed to investing the necessary resources into holistic development where learning, personal growth and change is central to the stated direction of the College? What types of students are able to carry out the vision of the NSCC in terms of service learning, self empowerment and developing a passion for lifelong learning rather than viewing education as merely a means to an end? The achievement rates for those students not ready to engage in such transformational processes is lower than for those who have explored personal growth and career needs before arriving at the college.

Although colleges stated goals reflect a developmental culture, policy and strategic development may reflect a negotiating and managerial culture respectively (Dennison, 1996). These competing cultures serve competing interests. The Community College is not organizationally a homogenous culture but rather a mosaic of competing subcultures.

What does it mean to confront and embrace an ever changing student body and ever changing economic demands for new workers and new citizens? The annual profiles of student success which implies graduating does not accurately reflect developmental profiles of a majority of students. In fact, most of these student success profiles are atypical from the majority of learners who face steep transitional and learning curves. The college needs to recognize the social and ethical implications of occupational education and transitional learning that impacts adversely upon a majority of students who pay their money to attend the college yet consistently withdraw or disengage for known and unknown reasons.

Psychosocial Readiness

Psychosocial maturity is a concept developed from Erik Erikson's eight psychosocial developmental stages. Erikson's life-span developmental theory is well known (Erikson 1950, 1959,

1963, 1968). Each stage has its distinct goal to be reached if healthy personality is to be realized. The interplay between personality, temperament and social ecologies influences the manner in which persons relate to each other. Finding meaning in experiences leads to psychosocial well being. Although psychosocial readiness may have innate dimensions it typically develops overtime and is influenced by the quality and consistency of relating to self and others. It is also influenced by resiliency in that the person is able to incorporate productive coping responses more so than non productive coping responses.

Temperament influences the quality and nature of our relating to others and our adaptability to unfamiliar situations. The quality of responsiveness and reciprocity influencing relationships take root during critical developmental periods and situations across the lifespan. Chronic conflict and crisis intermittent with periods of stability shape the emergence of an ego quality such as trust, initiative, or identity. The sustained tension of psychosocial dichotomies and their interrelated affects are the result of normative change and internalized experiences. Psychosocial growth and direction occurs when new dimensions of social interactions become possible. It is my argument that cycles rather than age defining stages reflect developmental capacities across childhood, adolescents and adulthood pulled upon by the social cultural constructs of lived experiences (Erikson 1950, 1959, 1963, 1968).

Psychosocial readiness is shaped by lived experiences both unique and normative. It is important for us to not devalue primary stages of human development as inferior to more complex processes. Case in point, sensory-motor development enables learning and relatedness to objects, places and people. It is more helpful to consider the pliability of psychosocial identity development and existing dichotomies present during infancy, childhood and youth versus rigidly defining what should or ought to emerge next, making development mechanical, controlling and predictable. For

example, how might our conscious observation of ego identity development during childhood help us to support youth with noticeable transitional struggle by rethinking ego identity?

Marcia's Identity Statuses

Erikson believed that most people achieved a stable sense of identity by the end of their teens. However, recent evidence challenged this view and acknowledged that a search for identity could continue well into the adult years (Ormrod, Saklofske, Schwean, Harrison & Andrews, 2006). As an extension of Erikson's work, Canadian psychologist, Marcia (1966, 1980, 1991) identified four identity statuses that reflect adolescents or young adult's search for a mature identity. A brief review of these statuses follows:

Identity Achievement: Strong sense of commitment to life choices after free consideration of alternatives; *Identity foreclosure*: Acceptance of other life choices without consideration of options; *Identity diffusion*: Uncentredness; confusion about how one is and what one wants; *Moratorium*: Identity crisis; suspension of choices because of struggle (Woolfolk, Winne & Perry, 2006, p. 65).

Whereas identity achievement and moratorium are considered healthy outcomes for identity formation, those experiencing identity foreclosure or diffusion have more adjustment challenges and difficulties (Woolfolk et. al., 2006). Although moratorium is considered healthy, it is a luxury that not all youth can afford or that not all educational institutions embrace, especially when the time frame for professional development is the same for all students regardless of their stage of development.

Youth explore alternative identities "in numerous areas, such as vocational, religious, intellectual, political, sexual, gender, ethnic, and interests (such as sports, art, music, reading and so on)" (Santrock, Woloshyn, Gallagher, DiPetta & Marini (2007). Identities may be more developed in

some of these areas than in others. According to Santrock et al. (2005), "Identities are developed in bits and pieces. Decisions are not made once and for all but have to be made again and again." (p. 323) The "MAMA" cycle of moratorium-achiever, moratorium-achiever is characteristic of individuals who have developed a positive identity. In a period of rapid economic and technological change, the flexibility exhibited by such a cycle might be optimally adaptive.

Early Research on Psychosocial Maturity or Readiness

Towards a concept of psychosocial maturation, the research by Greenberger and Sorensen (1974) argued that besides the promotion of educational outcomes that measure cognitive skills, there was a growing recognition of educational institutions potential role in promoting personal and social growth. According to Greenberger and Sorensen (1974), a convincing model of non-academic objectives was lacking as was a tool for assessing child and youth progress towards non academic objectives. To this end, the authors constructed a model of psychosocial maturation which specifies measurable attitudes and dispositions. The model of psychosocial maturation integrated sociological and psychological views of the person; that is, it took into account the requirements of societies as well as the healthy development of individuals. The model outlined three general dimensions of readiness which were likely to be relevant in all societies. These are (1) *the capacity to function adequately on one's own*, (2) *the capacity to interact adequately with others*, and (3) *the capacity to contribute to social cohesion*. Nine attributes judged pertinent to these capacities in this society were then defined. The final sections of the paper discussed problems in the measurement of psychosocial attributes, described the form of an instrument presently being devised, and suggested research uses of the instrument.

Research conducted by Josselson, Greenberger and McConchie (1977) studied the phenomenological aspects of psychosocial maturation in adolescence girls and boys by comparing and contrasting high and low psychosocial maturation. This research lent validity to the behaviour

challenges of fostering professional development across all programs, not solely to the program of health and human services. However, I believe that the research on female and male adolescence with low and high psychosocial maturation is still relevant to a significant percentage of human service students who are part of the echo generation age cohort. This population experiences the greatest struggles and attention of any of the cross section of human service students we accept each year into the school of Health and Human Services. Recent high school graduates and early young adults reflect two thirds of first year students at Truro.

Josselson et al., (1977) stated that high and low maturity females do not differ in school achievement, or in the rate by which they enrol in college preparatory programs. The high maturity females tended to have fathers who had more education than the low maturity girls. This is significant for many reasons but in particular many of the females who struggle with social emotional learning have estranged relationships with their biological fathers in that their fathers may be absent or emotionally uninvolved in their lives. With childhood and adolescence extended developmentally due to cultural forces over time, this has significant ramifications to diffusion and moratorium behaviours increasingly manifested by first year human service students who are recent graduates of Nova Scotia high schools and early young adults chronologically speaking. In terms of students transitioning and adapting to college expectations of reciprocal accountability, self regulation of learning, personal and professional development, students experiencing low psychosocial maturation tend to struggle with self examination of beliefs and values and critical reflection. They may be preoccupied with external locus of control beyond their educational experience which aggravates unresolved issues and repressed emotions.

The world of low psycho social maturity females is dominated by two concerns: having fun and having things. The lack of authentic self awareness among this cohort and their concrete

descriptions of their lives make it extremely difficult to be abstract and critically reflective of psychodynamic threads of their development. One gains little meaningful information from them about relationship paradigm in their families or about personally relevant growth experiences. Because of their external focus, they attribute the style and context of their existence to fate and reveal (or experience) too little of their inner selves for us to go much deeper into the enigma of their psychological development (Josselson et al., 1977, p. 156).

A model for measuring psycho social maturation is the psycho social inventory comprised on nine subscales. The three domains of focus individual competence, interpersonal competence and social competence highlight areas of self awareness and social consciousness that can be observed and assessed to determine the scope of psycho social maturation (Greenberger, Josselson, Kneer, and Kneer, 1975). The conceptualization problem here is consideration of the social/situational context of the 9 subscales. As with all surveys people will more than likely attempt to save social face if subjected to the psycho social maturation inventory. Do high psycho social maturity scores merely reflect an awareness of the socially desirable point of view? Are high scores therefore contaminated by a tendency to “fake good”? These questions posed by the authors of *The measurement and structure of psycho social maturation* bring to mind the attempt by the college to use a professional conduct rubric as a behaviour modification instrument to monitor and assess professional development and interpersonal adequacy of learners across programs (Greenberger et al., 1975). Secondly this model and categories are imposed upon the targeted population which may reflect a larger societal and moral agenda rather than valid inquiry of narrative and participatory approaches to get at the heart of individual, interpersonal and social competencies. We cannot assume for example that self reliance as quality and tangible evidence permeates every aspect of individual experiences.

Yet another problem with measuring psychosocial readiness or maturity is the cultural embedness of these constructs. Hoffman (2009) noted that constructs such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and so on are based on implicit ideologies of selfhood, reflective of Western cultural norms. For example, norms of emotional expression are not universal but highly conditioned by culture. Further, Hoffman (2009) cautioned that attempts to measure constructs related to emotion risk depicting these as fixed, individual traits rather than dynamic and reciprocal, depending on context and situation.

A study by Haymes and Greer (1977) did attempt to account for situational demands. This study on motivational maturity and helping behaviour was undertaken to examine the influences of conative development upon behavioural aspects of pro social orientations. It provided a behavioural demonstration of conative affects in a helping paradigm among college-age men. A comparison of data across the ages of 15-22 provided a cross-sectional view of conative development itself. Conative development was found to be predictive of greater helping among college-age men. Situational demands were demonstrated which tended to mask, but not override, these predispositional influences on helping. The cross-sectional data on conative development point to probable movement to early ego concerns among high school men who have reached the conative level of love and belonging. On the other hand, the stability across the years of 15-22 or proportion of safety concerns suggests fixation of such concerns in those exhibiting them in high school. Results are discussed in terms of conative growth and the development of pro-social orientations.

The relationship between psycho social readiness and various measures of academic ability and achievement in school reflects the struggle of many learners to adopt culturally sanctioned values of post secondary institutions that mirror industry. What comes to mind is the inadvertent continuation of regurgitated ideas, rehearsal of lines, appeasing relationships sometimes

reciprocated which amounts to compliant or calculated learning as a means of survival and meeting base needs and wants. The behavioural descriptions identified as relevant to four psycho social maturation qualities are self-reliance, work orientation (employability), social commitment and respect for differences. (p.136) The behavioural descriptions I see relevant to four PSR qualities as it pertains to adult education and skill development would be work orientation, service leadership learning, self direction/regulation and multicultural integrity. Psycho social maturation scores studied in relation to measures of self esteem, anxiety and neuroticism. Josselson et al., (1975) hypothesized that the three individualized adequacy subscales 1) self reliance 2) identity and 3) work orientation would be positively associated with self esteem and negatively related to anxiety and neuroticism.

Within the school of Health and Human Services there are multiple types of helping practices, approaches and human service work from palliative care to static security and rehabilitation programs with Provincial and Federal correctional facilities. The relationship between motivational maturity and helping behaviours from a needs perspective is helpful in predicting situational behaviours of helping and may serve to be very helpful in rethinking and critiquing just how we measure employability, personal growth processes, ethics to practice and whether intrinsic or extrinsic rewards reflect a healthy ego identity or compensating motivation for pursuing human service work.

What struggles and self sacrificing has the learner endured in order to ensure readiness and resolve to succeed with post secondary education and skill development? It is very difficult to determine the openness and receptiveness of first year students because they soon realize that they are under a microscope as their sense of self is examined as well as the quality by which they relate to others and manage conflict regardless of the age cohort. Social consciousness is questioned as

well as faculty attempts to uncover the quality and consciousness of cumulative life knowledge. According to Freire (1970): “adults achieve a deepening awareness of both the socio cultural reality which shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that actuality through acting upon it.” (p.27)

I am reminded of the years I spent working as a youth worker with male young offenders. The prescriptive approach practiced in adhering and enforcing court orders, principles of the Young Offender Act and mandate of the Department of Justice inadvertently resulted in a percentage of young offenders playing the game. Some openly resisted the ultimatum to rehabilitate or habituate dominant cultural mores and a small percentage adapted to the realities before them. In some ways this pattern parallels the adaptable behaviours of first and second year human service students. Sometimes it is obvious and other times it is not that some learn to appease and play the game. Many resent the self analysis they are expected to engage in and may harbour feelings of animosity for being challenged or confronted by approaches and assessments applied. Survival mode continues for some into their concentration year as learning focuses on specific skill(s) acquisition and re-socialization to organizational cultures students’ will be employed with after graduation.

Current Psychosocial Issues

Unlike the University model of four year degree programs, community college students have a smaller developmental window of two years to realize goal attainment while managing the impact of family relations, financial stressors, social connectedness and program demands. Developmental moratorium is not considered as essential processes individuals must experience in order to self determine purposeful learning. Yet, identity achievement is typically not attainable without struggle and exploration associated with developmental moratoria processes (Njus & Johnson, 2008). Increasing number of students is extending the duration of their education and thus cost, for a multitude of reasons thoroughly investigated in current research. With continued emphasis in the

Primary to Grade Twelve system on academics with minor emphasis placed upon psycho social development, it is not surprising the adjustment and struggles first year students' experience when conative processes of making meaning and understanding are emphasized.

Academic achievement appears to occupy the structural position in educational institutions that profit innovation in industry; curriculum is selected and arranged to enhance achievement; students may be grouped on the basis of current achievement test scores in order to maximize the effectiveness of instructional efforts (i.e. in order to increase students' subsequent test scores); and teachers may be held accountable for raising students level of achievement. The preeminent position of academic achievement in educational assessment is due less to a good theory of academic achievement than to the existence of standardized instruments to assess a wide range of achievement. Outside the school, social and political issues have been framed in terms of student rights to academic achievement; for example, the issue of equal educational opportunity.

Recent developments in educational assessment programs indicate a growing interest in the view that the schools should have a broad concern for the student's self awareness and societal consciousness without indoctrinating or imposing a political economic agenda upon the learner. Crysdale and MacKay (1994) noted that:

The passage of the young from school to work has become a critical social problem for most industrialized countries as they face fierce competition in a technologized world market. One underlying problem is discordance in the transitional processes between families, schools, communities, extracurricular and work history. Transition is most successful when the experiences of the young in these settings are constant and positive. The process is also affected by social structures and the psycho-social response of the individual. (p. 3-4)

What kind of “non-academic attributes” should schools promote and monitor? The list of values, attitudes, traits, and interests is potentially very long. I begin by positing an answer that stresses growth in the direction of greater personal awareness and social emotional resourcefulness. The term “resourcefulness” has three virtues: it serves as a clear contrast to academic achievement, it gives us an opportunity to discuss non-academic growth from several disciplinary points of view, and it turns our attention to theoretically “ideal” outcomes or end products of personal growth, development, and civic literacy.

In reviewing samples of research literature from the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, many of the articles that I encountered, and struggled with, frame research and current issues on the subject of psychosocial readiness in terms of resource capital. For example, research by Adams, Berzonsky, Keating (2006) examined psychosocial resources in first year university students. The investigation was designed to assess the role that family and post secondary relationships and identity processes played in predicting the psychosocial resources of first year university students and affirmed general arguments made thus far.

Many first year students vary as to psychosocial resources and readiness to engage in discourses that challenge and question motives for helping. Learners are expected to respond to invitational models that support or challenge them to begin or expand upon previous work they may have done in areas of professional development.

Adams et al. (2006) also examined James Marcia’s identity status research on the four identity statuses. These researchers believed that we struggle with keeping students engaged in part because we do not meet them where they actually are developmentally. According the Erikson’s (1968) theory of psychosocial development, universities provide an institutionalized moratorium when late adolescents can consider and experiment with various roles and options in their efforts to

construct a stable and coherent sense of identity. In terms of community college students, developmental moratorium may be a significant component of retaining students reflecting the spirit and practice of developmental education and effectively cultivating student success for individual students.

Despite Marcia's and Erikson's theoretical insights, there is generally no incubating period which would enable students time to work through moratorium and diffusion states in particular. Our expectations and approaches are at the identity achievement status level which implies that students have worked through earlier struggles and are not relying mostly on external motivation in pursuing program of choice and expected success. One false assumption presumes the students have thought about and resolved all of the issues related to preparation before entering the institution. Even with adult learners, we cannot assume they have reviewed the college calendar and are aware of graduation requirements and considered all other possible scenarios.

The business model that is increasingly applied to education does little to address the magnitude and complexity of psychosocial development issues. Instead, a commodity view of knowledge/education is promoted in the business of education prospective: ...

Students to post secondary education are education consumers with manifest needs, hopes and desires. Post secondary institutions and private delivers of education and skill development are striving constantly to gain that competitive edge to attract prospective consumers and retain current ones through effective marketing schemas (Jarrell, 2004, p. 518).

How do learners become aware of the intricate connection between patterns of their lives and the difficulties of inquiry and skill based practice? A percentage of first year students are seldom aware of these connections and this resonates strongly with cultural shock, confusion,

transference and finding a safe place where they can ease their way into the academic and interpersonal rigors of education and skill development. In terms of behavioural descriptors, service learning and leadership, Bond et al. (1974) examined the relationship of the three social adequacy subscales to student participation in social action projects. A group of college students self identified as having life experience that reflected community involvement, social political change and acceptance of diverse others. Seventy-one students were involved in volunteer programs requiring a substantial investment of personal time and effort. The PSR scores of the volunteers were compared with those of a control group of 44 students who had never participated in social action projects. The volunteers scored higher on each of the three PSR subscales than the control group. This inventory can be used to document the course of psycho social development over the course of formative years of schooling. It also reflects current research on service learning and its positive impact on academic learning as well as personal and social development (Simons & Cleary, 2007).

Njus and Johnson (2008) examined the hypothesis that psycho social identity development is related to need for cognition (NFC), a social-cognitive individual-difference variable defined as the desire to engage in effortful thinking. They administered 2 measures of psychosocial identity – a scale from the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status 2 (Adams, Bennion & Huh, 1989) and the identity subscale of the Erikson Psychosocial Inventory (Rosenthal, Gurney & Moore, 1981) - and the NFC scale to 200 incoming college students and approximately half of those students about 15 months later. Results indicate that people with higher psychosocial identity levels had higher NFC scores at both time periods.

The nature and level of complexity of course work presents stressors for students who are not aware of the cultural mind shift of the NSCC. Innovation, creativity, applied research, investigative reviews and other high mental processes require the student to be engaged in effortful

thinking. Certainly the Community College must be progressive not only in recruiting students but also in expanding orientations to address the myriad of needs individual learners and cohorts have. Students arriving at the community college with psychosocial struggles need to consider what challenges crises present both in terms of academics and their ability to engage in growth and self determination.

It has been mentioned that accommodation meetings for incoming students are one dimension of student support and recognition of the diversity of learner needs as it pertains to learning styles and academic supports. While these meetings have been effective for those students self advocating and accepting partnership in their learning, non cognitive variables that are significant determinants of the quality of engagement and whether a student stays is not part of a broader accommodation process.

Research has generally supported the value of prior grades as predictors of college grades or retention (Carnevale, Haghighat, & Kimmel, 1998; Sedlacek, 1998). It is not my intent to focus on this aspect of readiness only to make the point that often times little consideration is given to non cognitive or non-academic factors that significantly impact upon student selection of post secondary institution, program and persistence to completion. Research conducted by Sternberg (1985, 1986) offers compelling reasons to look beyond cognitive predictors of academic performance when making admission decisions. Sternberg emphasizes three types of intelligence: analytical, experiential and contextual. All three are relevant to this study on psychosocial and academic readiness for human service students. Analytic intelligence is the ability to interpret information in a hierarchical and taxonomic fashion. The second, experiential intelligence, involves the ability to interpret information in changing context. Lastly, contextual intelligence is the ability to adapt a changing environment, i.e. the ability to handle one's environment and negotiate the system. The

Non-cognitive Questionnaire (NCQ) is designed to measure Sternberg's (1985, 1986) experiential and contextual intelligences (Sedlacek, 1996; 2003; 2004; in press). The NCQ has been shown to have validity in predicting the success (outcomes and retention) of students in post secondary education. It has been shown to be particularly valid for students with less traditional experiences. What is significant about the NCQ is that it was designed to be used by institutional support to work with students developmentally.

Consistent with understanding the whole person, learning styles, diverse populations and meeting students where they are developmentally, it is critical to student persistence and goal attainment that the community college is aware of where students actually are in non cognitive areas of strengths.

Community College Research and Practice

Given the shortage of Canadian community college journals, this review focused predominantly on American Community Colleges with prominent and recurring focus on the student as their principal concern. By no means are these concerns for students driven by one theoretical or ideological perspective. However, what can be agreed upon is the focus of the research on student preparedness, student development, dimensions of student engagement, retention, psychosocial dispositions, college readiness, epistemological beliefs and learning processes. Research domains include non dominant cultures, enrolment management, access and persistence of low income students, first generation learners, and association of student success with faculty assessment, course specific challenges, and self placement and student backgrounds. From this list of domains, the subjects of research within the community college system of the USA are endless. However, concern regards college visions and just how they are operationalized impacting access, institutional engagement, persistence, and student success and goal attainment. With the increasing diversity of our student population and increased enrolment, the college will be taxed to meet each students

needs in supporting the broad goal of earning the credential and developing the skills to compete in the new economy.

Both quantitative and qualitative research reflects varying levels of inquiry, contributing to our understanding of institutional challenges to ensure access for individuals and educational relevance. In a recent address, Tinto (2002) advised that the key to retaining students is to “begin at the beginning”, since most students drop out their first year of college or in subsequent semesters as a result of what happened during the first year. Tinto argues further that the primary question involves “raising” the overall educational experience, not just “raising” retention. I would add that for those students who do not become well informed as to a clear understanding of their learning style and program compatibility, college expectations, support services, learning philosophy and the transforming culture of the NSCC, diverse orientations may need to reflect developmental needs beyond social integration.

Student Attrition

Attrition is typically associated with scholastic challenges, excessive work load, family responsibilities, and /or the lack of commitment to personal educational goals and program outcomes. Tinto (1993) asserted that: “less than 25% of all students drop out because of academic failure while more than 75% of students who leave college do so because of difficulties related to lack of fit between the skills and interests of students and the organization culture of educational institutions, their formal structures, resources and patterns of association” (p. 89). Meeting the individual where they are needs to value the life experience of each student and the cumulative affect these experiences have had in terms of psycho social well being and resourcefulness.

In Conklin’s (1997) study on course attrition: why students drop classes, the top seven reasons were (1) work schedule conflicts (2) bad time/inconvenient (3) personal problems (4) too

hard/bad grades (5) disliked instructor (6) course load too heavy (7) disliked course. In terms of institutional accountability which encompasses all aspects of organizational culture and making connections with students, it is helpful for the college to track course, program and overall college attrition by formalizing the withdraw, transfer and exit process that students must adhere to. Through a comprehensive process the college is able to objectively determine its impact upon the students' actions to disengage from a specific program and in many cases the institution. How are colleges able to assist individual students with identified challenges and conflicts that inevitably contribute to the number of students withdrawing from colleges and universities across North America?

Student Engagement and Learning Styles

On the subject of student engagement and associated benchmarks, the Nova Scotia Community College participated in a North American survey (CCSSE) that captures the experiences and activities of two-year post secondary colleges. This instrument was intended to be used as a tool for improving teaching and learning by assessing the extent to which students are engaging in effective educational practices (Marti, 2009). The quality of engagement and thus learning reflects many issues mentioned in the literature referenced.

The quality of learning should reflect learning style preferences that ought to advantage the student. Learning style research has indicated that students succeed in learning environments that match their learning styles (Border & Chism, 1992; Entwistle, 1981; Kolb, 1984, McCarthy, 1980; Sims & Sims, 1995). The question I would pose regarding learning style or preference to learning would be whether (LS) reflects individual constitutions or social cultural influences. The relevance of past and present research on (LS) and student engagement is helpful in considering whether particular programs and course work lend to learning styles of students. Do first year students have an understanding of the concept of learning style and are they able to articulate its understanding

and significance to evidence based or portfolio learning in distinguishing supposed innate qualities from societal expectations that cumulatively influence learning style, preference and mastery? In terms of human services and I suspect other programs. The learning domains of thinking, doing, reflecting and experiencing are learning processes that all students must utilize in order to excel in learning. There are many models of student types and this is helpful in understanding strengths of students. However labelling, identifying or describing learning styles does not necessarily reflect strength when applied to Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy of Learning. Learning styles perhaps are as much developmental as they are fixed and concrete and quality of life opportunities and concerted cultivation will manifest both strength in certain domains and the abilities of students to make transitional shifts in conceptualizing, perspective taking, making meaning, problem solving and application. Findings from research conclude that students do have the ability to shift processes from preferred learning approach to meet the learning strategy requirements of other learning situations (Cornett, 1983; Entwistle, 1981; Kolb, 1984; Ornstein, 1977). My intent in referencing this research is its association with student engagement which presents developmental complexities that the college may not directly have control or influence over.

Developmental Education

In referencing Kolajo's (2004) research on developmental education and its positive relationship to graduation rates, I am reminded of arguments I presented regarding academic readiness of first year students. Not tiring of the concerns of students' personal and academic development, I raised the issue at every opportunity and through the influence of Hugh MacIntyre, academic chair of the school of health and human service, Truro campus was granted the "go ahead" to launch a pilot program for students who self determined their readiness to pursue first year studies. Through accommodation meetings conducted during the spring intercession and early June, some students who were accepted into first year studies reconsidered their decision based on

more information regarding the nature of human service education and learning processes employed. With the existence of the General Arts and Science human service stream (now academic and career connections) the student had a realistic option to consider that would support their developmental needs and goal to pursue human service education. This approach and measure of meeting students where they are reflects how essential developmental education is to the long term successes and goal attainment of individual students.

Kolajo's (2004) work tracked the academic performance of developmental and non developmental students and examined the effects that developmental courses had on subsequent academic progress leading to graduation. During the three-year period considered, over 61% of the College's graduates took one or more developmental course. The study showed that there is a positive link between the number of developmental courses taken, retention and schedule to graduation. These findings are consistent with first year human service students' adjustments and performances who previously engaged in developmental programs or course work prior to enrolling in the two year diploma program. In particular, those who successfully complete the adult learning program experience a less difficult adjustment and in many cases thrive in core programs. Students' transferring from first year programs to the Adult Learning Program or Academic and Career Connections feel supported in their goal to receive quality education. This model of adult education is critical to the developmental needs of a significant percentage of educational consumers. These students need to be actively preparing themselves personally and academically in order to take advantage of the educational opportunities availed to them through open access. It is the college's resolve to affect every aspect of the students' experience that promotes growth, change, successes, goal attainment and gainful employment (NSCC, 2000).

Academic Success, Persistence and Retention

The existence of a community college in Nova Scotia and its open access policy has resulted in a growing number of non traditional college students as well as increased numbers of college bound high school graduates across the province. Each cohort is presented with similar and distinct challenges in terms of financing their education, belonging, pace of learning and managing external stressors and expectation. The non traditional and first generation students tend to be female, identify with a minority ethnic group, child care responsibilities and income challenges. In knowing program, campus and college demographics of students, it is imperative that the college establish working liaisons with support systems that traditional adult learners rely on in order for them to not only see but to also realize themselves within the vision and mission statement of the college. Researchers have found that one of the most important predictors of persistence among college students is the educational levels of their parents. (Choy, 2001; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) Prospero and Vohra-Gupta (2007) identify significant factors both academically and personally that influence level of social integration and retention of first generation students. Most first generation students tend to be older than traditional college first year students. Motivation for attending college might be obvious; however in considering the dynamics of motivation, external factors correlate with academic struggle and attrition. Studies have found that an unclear purpose for being in college, problems adjusting to college and feelings of isolation are reasons for (FGS) to abandon their pursuit of a college education (Olenchak & Herbert, 2002). In transferring Marcia's identity status theory to student readiness, identity status in particular emphasizes the purposefulness of one's decision to pursue post secondary education.

In some instances students may not be as ready or prepared to experience connectedness and transformational learning due to external bureaucratic barriers. Sponsored students in particular could be disadvantaged due to paternalistic and systemic practices of Federal agencies

and contracted agents that process clients request for career counselling, upgrading, education and skill renewal. Although this particular issue is separate from the research by Smith, Street and Olivarez (2002) on early, regular, and late registration and community college student success. It has been my experience that students who are uncertain whether they will have the funding to finance their education or are on program wait lists are not able to ready themselves as students who have applied to the community college under less stressful circumstances. The stages of information seeking and circumstances affecting decision making to enrol in a post secondary institution is complex and in many ways the college needs to be connected to individual processes well before the student is accepted into post secondary programs.

A study by Smith, Street and Olivarez (2002) examined whether early, regular or late registration students differ from each other in terms of their academic success and retention. Research Question 1: do semester grade point average (GPA) goal or course attainment rates, exit rates and persistence differ between new students according to time of registration after adjusting for age and weight of course hours? The major findings were as follows. For both new and returning students, late registrants were shown to be much less likely to persist than early or regular registrants. Of the new students, 80% of the regulars and 35% of late registrants were retained to the next semester. Clearly registering early or before deadlines reflects many things that the study did not identify, however the study did show the significant of early/late registration and student retention. The practice of late registration ensures access for student to participate in post secondary education but may reduce their chances for social integration, varying successes and goal attainment.

As referenced by community college research with a student centered focus, a multitude of factors is associated with the quality of experience students will encounter and their levels of

success. This research literature reflects recurring themes that help make meaning of the complexities of access, institutional connectedness, engagement, personal growth, successful completion of chosen programs and employment opportunities. The literature supports the focus on psycho social and academic readiness and the depth of awareness needed to effectively respond to the ongoing struggles that first year students will face as the result social change, personal growth challenges, institutional cultures and student expectations.

CHAPTER III

Methodology Research Design

The method of inquiry was a series of focus groups to investigate experiences with the first year human service program from the perspective of students as well as faculty, centre for student success personnel and administrators at the Truro Campus of the Nova Scotia Community College. Participants discussed their experiences through a framework of open-ended questions and related questions that emerged from the research process.

One theoretical framework that guided a portion of my investigation was Erikson's (1950, 1968) psychosocial developmental theory. I attempted to make sense of the increasing concerns about the challenges of student readiness from faculty and industry for learners to immerse themselves immediately into an examination of their values and beliefs and question their motives and suitability to learn cognitively, socially and emotionally. My purpose was not to impose a theoretical explanation on the reasons learners struggle with human service education and training. Rather the dialogue that emerges between theory and shared experiences will hopefully get at the heart of external and internal concerns.

Focus Group Research

The focus group is a research method based on the dynamics of communications, language and thought (Markova, 2004). By using group interaction, the researcher can explore how accounts are expressed and negotiated. In other words, focus groups are said to offer an opportunity to observe the co-construction of meaning among participants. Communication enables persons to explain or propose perspectives to perceived problems and concerns (Kitzinger, 2007). First person perspectives it is hoped will help us discover our blind spots and the unknown of what learners,

faculty, support services and academic chairs experience related to the questions and issues the research is investigating.

Focus group research is a form that allows the researcher or moderator to interview a group of 4 to 10 participants to discuss, reflect, perspective take and share what each person has perceived and experienced regarding the phenomenon being investigated. Although the group is typically homogenous in nature, it is possible to conduct focus groups with heterogeneous groups (Wibeck, Dahlgren, & Öberg, 2007).

Some advantages of this small group are that you can limit the size to 4 or 8 persons and they can provide support, empathy and encouragement to each other without fostering contagion. What is meant by contagion is the social psychological phenomenon that occurs from time to time with support groups when disclosures are free flowing and the purpose of the group is not clearly identified at the beginning of the data gathering. One participant might become overly influenced by another.

In this study, the relatively homogenous nature of participants helped to encourage a safe place, trust and other psychosocial factors not considered when identifying and soliciting participants. However, one needed to be cognizant of “group think” developing rather than a celebration of the multiple lenses through which the phenomenon is experienced and shared with others. Sharing and responding to questions is not meant to foster competition or “one upping” each other. It was the responsibility of the moderator to ensure that contagion was minimized in order to maintain a balance between objective and subjective experiences (Wibeck et al., 2007).

Group interaction is one key to focus group research and the moderator should monitor both verbal and non verbal messages to ensure that all individuals feel valued and heard. The epistemological and ontological assumptions of the research will also impact the intent of the

moderator and regard held for selected participants. Research is not an objective process of knowing because of our subjective position and bias that motivates the choice of research. Through the moderators' encouragement, empathic responses, questioning and shared experiences of participants, I hoped a broader understanding of the transitional challenges for first year human service students was achieved for concerned stakeholders.

Focus group research is useful for exploring people's knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but why they think and feel that way. Participants are able to own the research in that the investment of time, authentic disclosure and the contribution of ideas and experiences will not be devalued at the conclusion of the research. Perspective taking research may foster these principles and practices more so than truth-seeking approaches that take the status quo as a given (Langenbach, Vaughn, & Aagaard, 1994).

Focus group research has been used increasingly over the past few decades to enhance the empowerment of historically silent or disadvantaged groups. Focus groups can actively facilitate discussion of sensitive and taboo subjects because less inhibited participants break the ice for those not accustomed to having an authentic voice. Learned fears due to one's history of being in groups that attempt to maintain control through silencing, ostracizing, shaming and marginalizing is minimized (Markova, 2004).

As a method of inquiry focus group research has its limitations. Participants are chosen non-randomly and generalized inferences cannot be made to a broader population or society. However in comparison to generalized studies, focus groups can provide a deeper understanding of the phenomena under investigation (Wilbeck et al., 2007).

Philosophical and Theoretical Underpinnings

The method of inquiry cannot be imposed or prescribed but rather recognized as open theoretical research, referencing Patti Lather's work on values based research (Lather, 1986). The endeavour is to learn through the experiences and processes of this research by engaging participants face to face and not losing focus on purpose of current research. Who is to benefit from the research? Principally the learner and secondly all other stakeholders involved in this process. Too often the findings of research do not trickle down to the populations studied to influence policy and collaborative change. Research should help us examine the everyday experiences of career focused learning in order to be conscious of what is taken for granted based on rigid mental representations and categorizations.

One section of the student focus group analysis was based on Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. This theory, in particular ego identity, ought to be reflected through lived experiences rather than imposing theories or labelling individual challenges. In other words, making meaning of a person's history validates theoretical relevance and accuracy. From life histories we discover themes, patterns, and variations of people's lives. I also needed to consider the historical context of Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory. What do we assume peoples' lives are?

Erikson provides a guiding framework that conceptualizes critical life tasks within social, cultural, class, gender and ethnic contexts. The psychosocial history of each learner is relevant to the college's ability to appropriately and accurately support student needs on a case by case basis versus assuming that all at the same starting point merely because the student satisfies the base prerequisites of having a grade 12, equivalent or prior learning.

Will this inquiry contribute to our understanding of the demands, expectations and challenges of the human services program? Will the inquiry reveal insights into why some achieve while others experience difficulties. These questions are raised with the recognition that inevitably, delivery models, approaches and practices vary throughout programs, courses and campuses across the Nova Scotia Community College.

Participants

Three focus groups of cohorts were conducted. One group consisted of students in their concentration year of the human service diploma program. The majority of these learners not only successfully completed year one but also developed a connection with the philosophy and culture of human service education, human service cultures and skill development. Conjoint cognitive and affective learning and assessment make human service education distinct for first year learners.

Participants were non-randomly selected across five second year concentrations. My selection criteria for volunteer participants were interest in the study and being willing and able to articulate experiences in or perceptions of the program. I also wanted persons who could see the potential benefit from participating in this study.

Historically there has been a disproportionate representation of females to males pursuing human services education. A percentage of second year learners consist of students who were in first year studies at Truro. The remaining second year students would have spent their first year at other campuses across the Community College but have since transferred to Truro.

A second focus group consisted of human service faculty from first and second year programs. Faculty were core instructors which mean that they teach the majority of courses to first and second year learners. Faculty who instruct in second year programs are considered the concentration content experts while first year faculty are more generalist in the sense that they

cover foundational content. Core instructors in first and second year programs have industry experience and are thus educators and industry practitioners.

Another cohort not included was faculty who taught related subjects to human service learners. They have a different perspective of learning in that they generally could be considered academic educators in terms of their orientation. They generally are not from the field of human service work and therefore, have a unique perspective apart from core faculty concerns and approaches.

The Center for Student Success plays a critical role in students being able to make the transition from high school or adult learners continuing their education as a result of career and personal transitions. This administrative and support team attends to the day to day issues of customer and learner satisfaction as well as fiscal accountability. Key players in the centre for student success are the registrar, mental health counsellor, retention officer, distinct populations support, retention, career specialist and coordinator of student life and others. Their experiences with learners provided another context for examining psychosocial readiness for first year learners. The general question or concern with all focus groups was how will they identify with and relate to the research?

Also included in the third focus group were the academic chairs of the schools of Access, Business/Information Technologies and Human Services. This group perhaps may be the most diverse due to school dynamics. These focus groups took place within the context of multiple and shifting challenges and demands. All post secondary institutions and private trainers are competing for a scarce number of high school graduates and others.

New technologies and learner types are dictating learner experiences, demands and constant modifying of access, delivery and assessments. It is hoped, in light of the multiple

considerations facing management that the research questions will generate meaningful discussion and challenge regarding how each group is connected to the tangible factors of psychosocial readiness, learner success and industry and economic capacity to enhance human capital and quality of life of Nova Scotians.

Focus Group Questions

A number of open ended questions were constructed from multiple issues examined and considered in relation to psychosocial readiness. The questions guided the inquiry concerning the perceptions, emotions and realities of how each student experiences the culture of human service education and training. The questions also stimulated or prompted discussion and contemplation of motivations for program selection. It was hoped that responses would lead to further questioning rather than premature interpretation and explanation. The remaining questions reflected the continuity of subjects and issues related to readiness and the learner's perception of self regulated learning.

The sequencing of questions supported the magnitude of issues raised. There were different sets of open ended questions for the three different focus groups. These questions were adapted for faculty, student services and academic chairs/management consistent with the focus on psychosocial readiness. Other questions focused on adult learners, androgical approaches and cultural compatibility of first year learners. Remaining questions related to admission policies, attrition/retention discussion and social change that shape learner types and expectations of age cohorts within human service programs. It was hoped these questions would stimulate greater insight and perspective from stakeholders. See examples of focus group questions in Appendix A and Appendix B.

Procedures

Once approved from the University Ethics Review Board and from the Nova Scotia Community College Department of Applied Research, information letters were distributed that explained the study and set up times and locations of choice for all participants in the three focus groups identified. The study and literature review were focused on psychosocial and educational readiness of first year learners as well as historical perspectives of vocational technical education and the social conditions that drive education. I wrote one letter, specific for each group that participated in the study.

An outside moderator facilitated all three focus groups and my direct involvement included debriefing the experience of the moderator and observer since I was not physically present. A tape recorder was used to record all feedback and discussions and I transcribed the data verbatim after the entire research process was completed. Use of an outside moderator was a precondition for conducting the research. The community college review committee expressed concerns that students might feel a sense of obligation to participate in the study. Although I no longer taught these students, I was still asked to write employment references for them from time to time. I immediately thought of asking Fonda Smyth from the school of business if she would consider moderating the focus groups. She read my proposal and was familiar with Erikson's theory. Fonda was open-minded, non-judgemental, interested in faculty research and well experienced with facilitating focus groups in business. Prior to the focus groups sessions, we met several times to review the process, guiding questions, and the premise of psychosocial readiness and its relevance to student success.

The moderator reviewed the purpose of the research orally with each focus group and distributed consent forms requesting permission from each participant in order to document disclosures and findings of the study. The size of each group ranged from 4 to 8 participants per

session helped to ensure comfort, intimacy, trust and direct involvement. We deliberated on concerns influencing group dynamics to ensure good fit, participants feeling safe, non judgmental and shared value by each participant. Selection of location and size of space was also considered to discourage inadvertent negative effects. Proximics in the seating arrangements were considered in our attempt to avoid physical or psychological barriers. Efforts were made to ensure that each group felt that they were co-collaborators in this research and able to discover and see the direct benefits this research could have for them.

Data Gathering and Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is based on a constructive strategy that involves abstractions, identifying similar ideas and differences in patterns with the purpose of discovering what constructs, categories and themes can emerge (Huberman & Miles, 1994). Qualitative researchers attempt to build theoretical categories inductively and to explain the phenomena under investigation. Consideration of context is especially important in a qualitative analysis. Qualitative researchers try to understand how context shapes or informs participant's perceptions of the phenomena under investigation (Williams & Katz, 2001). Focus group participant's perceptions, values and actual experiences will create the context for understanding psychosocial readiness and student success from the perspectives of individuals and the three distinct groups.

Before the data gathering process began I needed to design the focus research questions that reflected continuity with the problem statement, purpose of the study and introduction to the study. It was hoped that this process would ensure that I remained focused within a theoretical framework of issues and experiences through the lens of all participants.

Once the focus groups were completed, audio tapes were reviewed several times to ensure that relevant themes, patterns, categories and distinct experiences were identified. I compared and

contrasted participant's responses to focus group questions for similarity and difference of experiences and perspectives. These themes, with verbatim quotes noted that illustrate the themes adequately, were identified by reading and rereading the transcripts. Theme titles were generated that best portrayed the regularities or commonalities in the data and the connections among these. This process was predominantly intuitive but informal coding was also conducted to distinguish intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and instrumental, communicative and transformative modes of learning. Although there were theme similarities across focus groups, the set of themes for each group was unique. It was critical to identify the context of data analysis and whether it helped me better understand the phenomena being investigated.

Issues of Validity and Reliability

I was able to assess the validity and reliability of this study after data had been reviewed and analyzed. Although not exhaustive, the literature review provided credible evidence that analyzing learner readiness from a psychosocial developmental framework was helpful in studying this phenomenon. I was not preoccupied with multiple discourses that argue the pros and cons of qualitative research and the quantitative standards such research is sometimes held up to. The overriding concern regards validity.

The conduct of the focus groups was a key consideration to ensure a quality study. It was paramount that a relaxed and safe environment for sharing be established through the relating skills of the moderator. Willing participation and genuine interest of focus group participants along with their authentic regard for collaborative processes was also critical to the quality of insight and understanding shared. I was confident that this participatory and inclusive process resulted in a willingness to share meaningful experiences to determine the extent to which the focus of the study supported our understanding of psychosocial and academic readiness.

The context of the study was about how each participant experienced or identified with ideas, issues, perspectives and experiences encountered in the research. Focus group participants' level of engagement and understanding determined the quality of inquiry in order to frame psychosocial readiness within the shared experiences of learners and the relationship context experienced by faculty, academic chairs and center for student success.

It was anticipated that there would be multiple contexts through which learner readiness was viewed. Eisner's point that different critics or populations might attend to different dimensions of the same work needed conscious attention (Eisner, 1991). I have come to the overwhelming realization that research ought to involve a deep engagement with the perspectives of others and the faithful portrayal of these despite our own interests shaped by our lived experiences. The business of research and personalities of those who conduct research can skew the assumed objectivity and validity of any research.

I needed to be conscious of validity issues prior, during and after the study was complete. The job of validation is not to support a particular interpretation but to be open to what a particular interpretation might reveal or conceal (Cronbach 1980). Qualitative inquiry enabled us to move beyond rigid definitions and dominant discourses that attempt to support a pre-established account rather than valuing the experiences of all who participate in the process. Theories ought to identify and reflect lived experiences disclosed rather than imposing cultural constructs of identity on individual experiences.

By explaining the purpose of the research to each focus group, critically reviewing volumes of research literature as well as contemplative reflection over the years, I hoped to generate interest and support for the study. Cross sectional participation would aid me in determining the face validity of challenges of first year human services students in particular. It was hoped that this

inquiry would create desired interest to further study learner types, faculty approaches, modes of delivery, assessment of learning and just how authentic and transformative learning is experienced and achieved.

In addition to considering the context of the study, the anticipation of multiple perspectives and the conduct of the focus group as evidence of quality in the study, the literature was searched for criteria of quality appropriate for this type of inquiry. Eisner's notions of validity and reliability as these constructs relate to qualitative research seemed appropriate for this purpose.

Eisner's Criteria of Validity and Reliability

Eisner (1991) offered three criteria for assessing validity in qualitative research: structural corroboration, referential adequacy and consensual validation. The first criterion, structural corroboration refers to the extent that different data sources support or refute an account or interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. This criterion has limited applicability to the present study because focus groups are the primary source of data. However, the three focus groups differ so the extent to which different groups support or refute each other can be checked as can the insights across groups in relation to ideas encountered in the literature. Instead of relying on a single perspective, multiple perspectives provided by focus groups enabled the researcher to compare and contrast ideas.

The second criterion, consensual validation, examines the occurrence of similarities and differences with an interpretation plus an evaluation of the reasons each observer offers to support a particular interpretation. Consensual validation can be checked across different focus groups and among individual participants in a single focus group. Lack of consensus does not mean that the research is invalid but highlights differences in perspective within and across groups.

Third, the interpretive inquiry “should bring about more complex and sensitive human perception and understanding” (Eisner, 1991, p.113). In other words, the criterion of referential adequacy should be met. Interpretation of focus group data should help the reader of this inquiry develop greater insight about the issues addressed and possibly, empathetic understanding of the struggles facing some students who enrol in health and human services programs. The reader should be better able to understand what is entailed when students enrol in Health and Human Services programs. (i.e., challenges, expectations and demands)

In terms of reliability, the consensus on qualitative research is that you cannot make inferences to the larger phenomena or population in question. Despite the preeminent status of quantitative research, Eisner (1991) refers to the process of extracting themes or identifying the recurring messages that pervade the issues or phenomena being investigated (p. 104). My point of reference to this focus group research is longitudinal in that my reasons for focusing on psychosocial readiness has a direct relationship to approaches of human service education and personal growth work learners are expected to engage in. It is within this social historical context that recurring experiences of first year students have revealed ethical, professional and concern for the learner, consistent over the past 10 years. I first questioned learner’s readiness to engage in adult education and skill development in 1997. The themes from students’ reflective journals, projects and other assessments from 1997 to 2007 had a pervasive quality and there was consistency among personal disclosures and behaviours past and present impacting directly on positive development and student achievement.

Qualitative research ought not to attempt to control responses to fit predictions and assumptions in question but contribute increased insight and understanding of the issues meeting

the criteria. In reality, qualitative research often works opposite to quantitative versions by concluding with more nuanced questions after the process is complete.

It is my position that student achievement and levels of success in human service education and training needs to be examined within the developmental context of psychosocial readiness as well as curriculum/evaluations and time durations afforded learners.

Students have been “my learner” for the past 15 years so in essence, I have contemplated the need for such a study for some time. Reflective journaling by students has afforded me the privilege of glimpsing behind the curtains of learner’s lives, metaphorically speaking, in sharing personal experiences and perspectives, it is hoped that authentic insight can be gained into lived experiences beyond multiple developmental theories.

Ethical Considerations

A letter was drafted and sent to all potential participants informing them of the purpose of my research. The letter addressed the three major ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality and benefits and risks.

Informed Consent The letter of informed consent identified and explained the nature of the research and the methods applied to data gathering and analysis.

This focus group research made use of audio tapes with the permission of participants in order for the moderator to fully attend to what was being shared. There were three focus group cohorts consisting of second year learners, faculty of the school of Health and Human Service, academic chairs of human services, business/information technologies, school of access and personnel from the Center for Student Success.

Informed consent speaks to the issue of being informed of the purpose of the study and its relevance or interest to each participant. Using a collaborative and volunteer participatory approach, it was hoped to achieve the consent of those contacted to consciously agree to participate. The outcomes of the study unfolded as a result of this approach.

Confidentiality All information collected during the study was confidential, and samples of background information could not be used to identify individual participants. The groups' discussion was audio taped for transcribing and analysis and will be erased once this process is complete. Written transcriptions of the tapes will be shredded. All information gathered was stored in an access-controlled computer file or stored filing cabinet and used only by the researcher and his supervisor and was kept confidential. Consent forms were stored separately from audio tapes and transcripts in a locked filing cabinet and shredded immediately after completion of the study. A summary of the results will be distributed to management, participants and any interested non participants at the Truro campus of the Nova Scotia Community College.

In order to achieve ethical standards, participants must understand and consider the essential need for safeguarding and maintaining confidentiality. Because audio tapes were used, participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts of the session they participated in to ensure that which was recorded was what was intended. I provided a form of confidentiality that holds all participants accountable for ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

The integrity and credibility of the research, the moderator and the researcher could only be ensured by recognizing the autonomy of each participant to engage or disengage at anytime or stage of the research. In order to avoid unintended deception and to protect from harm, there will need to be a general understanding of the focus of the research and intended use.

Potential Risks and Benefits While the study was minimal risk to participants, there was a chance that some of the questions or subsequent questions and varying responses might upset some individuals; therefore, besides a moderator, an observer/note taker was present in order to attend to both verbal and non verbal communications as well as perception checking with group participants. The moderator informed participants how they could contact me when the group is finished if they had further questions.

To determine risks and benefits, a synopsis of the purpose of the study was provided at the beginning of each focus group. I respected of autonomy of participants and the potential of qualitative research for self empowerment and ethical action. Risk of harm was also predetermined during the ethical review process. Questions of concern were posed that I had not considered or given thought to regarding the potential for harm. These concerns were addressed before proceeding with the study. Core ethical principals were also addressed in the letter inviting participation.

Ethical Responsibility

It is through this collaborative approach that each of us takes ethical responsibility for the findings. I sought interested and authentic participants who felt no obligation to me or the research. The incentive to participate in this research had to be intuitively recognized by each participant relating to the much broader issue within the Community College of measuring learner success and identifying the complexities of ongoing transitional challenges of first year learners at the Truro Campus. As part of achieving validity and reliability, research must be open and each participant recognized for their potential to engage in authentic sharing, reflection, perspective taking and relevant disclosure of what is felt, believed, experienced and assumed.

CHAPTER IV

Analysis and Interpretation

In this chapter, themes from the student, faculty and center for student success personnel and administrator (academic chairs) focus groups are presented. Seven major themes were identified from analyzing the student focus group data. Analysis of the faculty focus group and CSS and AC focus group revealed four key themes and five key themes respectively. Some of the themes were shared across groups; others were distinct to a particular focus group

Thematic Analysis of Student Focus Group

Seven second year students in the Health and Human Service program participated in the student focus group. Student focus group participants provided thoughts, recollections and reflection and responses to the guiding questions. Although the data recording captured micro and macro themes along with social chatter, the purpose of this analysis was to identify themes most reflective of the students' experiences. Recurring themes considered most significant in determining normative socialization processes and anomalies helped me to consider each unique experience rather than assuming that all students' experiences are similar. The themes I was able to identify spoke to personal needs and reasons for program selection. Secondly distinctiveness of the education experience emphasizes the significance of learning as an active and self determined process. Individual narratives of positive and negative experiences and the educational and personal growth challenges were both introspective and retrospective. Students made the connection with their social and scholastic history and their ability to adapt and transition to adult education.

Not only were prominent themes generated to reflect the perspectives and experiences of the student focus group but the data were reanalyzed from the perspective of Erikson's psychosocial framework and Marcia's work on identity statuses. This second layer of analysis provided another

way to view the data in my attempt to identify crisis and resolve that weigh heavily on the actual experiences of learners and their social, emotional and cognitive state to achieve educational ends.

Motivations for Enrolling in the Program

Focus group student participants were asked why they chose Health and Human Services as their program of study. All seven participants were readily able to share reasons for choosing Health and Human Services. Analysis of these reasons revealed underlying motivations that could be classified as extrinsic (factors external to the individual), intrinsic (intra-psychic factors or those within the individual's control) or combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivations

Although each person has different reasons for pursuing education depending on past and present life experiences, the main reason student focus group participants share for enrolling in the human services program is the need or wish to help others. This motivation is predominantly intrinsic in nature. For example:

All I knew was that I wanted to help others. (Male 1)

I felt I needed to make a difference and was capable of making a difference. (Female 1)

Students were influenced by persons who already worked in the field and their personal history, life experiences and struggles attracted them to a place that they assumed and perceived as safe to obtain the qualifications needed to be employed in human service work. For many, helping others and making a difference may have been tied to their sense of self worth.

Another intrinsic motivation was the search for change from merely holding a job to having a meaningful career. Wang (2008) distinguished job from career by describing job as a means of making money to meet basic survival needs while career required more emotional investment and

overall commitment. A career was part of one's identity and sense of self-worth and thus, had intrinsic value. A career was valuable in its own right and more than simply a means of survival or means to another end.

I was sort of having a conflict with who I was as a person, just discovering what I liked and what I was good at. I was in a field (business/administration/purchasing) and I just knew that it was not important to me. (Female 1)

I was in a job. However, I figured I wanted more than a job. I wanted a career. (Female 6)

In addition to helping others, lifestyle choices such as balancing work and family life figured prominently in some students' motivations for enrolling in human services. At times, lifestyle choices took precedence over whether the program was a good fit or not. In most cases, however, students were looking simultaneously for a good fit between their program choice, personal interests and lifestyle choices. To follow are examples of lifestyle choices reflecting extrinsic motivation:

I have a daughter, wanted more money and a job that could provide her a quality of life. (Male 1)

I have a three year old and I wanted something while he was small that was day care hours and stuff like that and on to the summers so that I would have time to do things with him. (Female 3)

For Female 4, length of program and cost were major considerations. She was a single parent so the child's needs were part of the decision making process that she engaged in rather than acting under duress or reactive response of necessity, convenience or socialization. Her conscious

consideration of external realities that significantly influence outcomes and experiences were part of the decision making process:

I started this process when I became pregnant on what I wanted to do with my life and I had three years to figure this out. I never swayed or doubted this choice or the experience of the first year. (Female 4)

For students who were also parents, the intrinsic motivation of having a career that tied in with a sense of identity and personal development (intrinsic motivation) was also combined with the extrinsic need to balance work with family needs. Although meeting family needs is classified as extrinsic, this motivation is other-oriented rather than self-oriented. Students with outside obligations such as family or work typically express a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for their career paths.

Factors such as location of the program, availability of funding, and expected salary were among reasons for enrolling in the program. These factors reflected extrinsic motivation. For example, Male 1 shared that availability of funding created the opportunity to return to school since his work at the time of his decision was a dead end. Other participants shared the following:

I figured out what the wages were for educational assistant. That type of job gives me money that I need and time off that I need. (Female 4)

I did not want to move to the Annapolis Valley. (Female 5)

A major consideration for Female 4 was lifestyle accommodation whereas Female 5 was most concerned with program location when enrolling in community college.

It is important for the community college to recognize the variety of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations that prompt students to join human services. Further, these differences in motivation

illustrate the complexity of adult learners and readiness. For example, students who are parents or have family obligations are typically influenced by a combination of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. This knowledge could be helpful for recruitment, admissions and support for students throughout their program.

It is also important that students become self-aware of their motivations for entering the program because their first year focuses extensively on self-awareness in all its dimensions. These ideas will be explored further in the second theme.

Distinctiveness of First Year

In their responses to focus group questions, focus group participants addressed the distinctiveness of their first year studies. They were able to identify and discuss the emphasis faculty place upon critical reflection and how this conative process achieves intentional learning. The distinctiveness of first year studies and how learning is experienced place emphasis on self awareness and how students validate their learning. Many learners agonize over the immediate need to adapt and transition to new learning models and learning cultures compared to previous formal learning experiences.

Nature of 1st year learning

First year is clearly about transitioning cognitively from verbatim responses, memorizing and cramming to making meaning through reflection. Interactive processes challenge the student to become self directed, reciprocating and passionate about studies and learning processes. It is the essential transition from passive compliance to intentional and active learning. This transition challenges the student to take ownership for their learning through the process of self awareness and change. Change involves the student's willingness to participate in interactive learning processes, confronting growth inhibitions, experiencing self directedness, encountering genuine

regard of self and others and developing the inner resolve to transcend fears and doubts that inhibit learning and self transformation. In order to achieve self determination, students must connect with their reality by rethinking their life knowledge.

I recognize how perception of reality has been shaped by our cultural and preceding circumstances. Considering this helps the learner free themselves from rigid mental representations that many times reflect unconscious learning. According to Mezirow (1991), "Reflection is the central dynamic in intentional learning, problem solving and validity testing through critical and rigorous inquiry" (p.99). Reflection is not the immediate apprehension of thought and feeling but entails recalling, rethinking, reconstructing and making sense of experiences past and present that are often habitual, predictable and reactive.

Reflective learning involves assessment and reassessment of assumptions of self, perceiving others and cherished beliefs. Furthermore, the student is held accountable for their ideas and views:

You are going to be challenged on everything you say or anything you disclose. Any thought or feeling you have you are held accountable for so you need to reflect on premises, content, values and processes of knowing. (Female 1)

Being held accountable was one of the major shifts in our educational experience. Others failed because they were not accountable but were being held accountable. (Female 2)

It is important for each student coming in to know that every issue, pain or negative characteristic about them and their lives will be placed upon the table and scrutinized, analyzed and challenged for two years. (Female 7)

Consistent with adult learning principles and transformative learning, faculty engage students in deconstruction processes and identifying learned helplessness. Students move from

passive socialization to self advocacy and rethinking the mindset that it is up to others to make you something or somebody.

I greatly benefited from the self learning and self reflective practices that occurred that helped me focus my learning and to get to know who I was as a helper and as a person.
(Female 7)

Those that accepted and made this adjustment were fine and those that resisted missed out on a growth and conscious rising opportunity. (Female 2)

Meaningful life experiences accompanied us through this intense experience. Coming out of high school you are protected. In college you are no longer protected from the life experience. You are expected to have meaningful life experiences and make connections with your studies. (Female 6)

In order to provide a context for participants' discussions for their first year experiences, I will briefly describe two of the program's foundational courses. In first year of human service programs across the college all core courses are universal with standard texts as primary content to be examined, discussed and applied to personal growth and interpersonal relations development. The Personal Awareness and Growth course description states that this course introduces learners to the premise that self awareness is essential to being an effective human service professional. In examining and considering self awareness, learners will identify their strengths and skills and areas for development and self efficacy. Learners will focus on the need for personal wellness and actions to improve personal wellness. A second course entitled Interpersonal Insights – Self and Others introduces the learner to the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and communication concepts and perspectives integral to human service practice (*Course Syllabus 2008*). These two courses are the bookends of foundational course work in year one of the diploma program. The dialectical

approach for faculty student engagement in these courses must reflect interactive and not survey delivery. It is the challenge to create conative experiences that are strategic to emotive learning. Increased self awareness, conscious competence, generated insight and understanding are more likely to be achieved by the personal meaning students attribute to their experiences. Making meaning through critical reflection is the conscientious rigor to ensure that authentic learning has been experienced.

Many of the focus group participants found these courses relevant:

I found the experience useful in understanding self. The classroom was a venue where we could say who we were and then be able to reflect on this reconsidering that maybe we are not quite the person we perceive ourselves to be but an idea of who we would like to be.

(Female 4)

I found it to be quite impressive how each course was linked to the next one. If you were in psychology you would be talking about sociology. It was all relevant and related. You could interpret any topic in any subject you were doing. It all came together like a puzzle. (Female

1)

Because of the nature of first year learning, there are several levels of transitioning that students must make in order to be successful in achieving course outcomes and self-awareness. Fears and doubts which contribute to anxiousness are perhaps the greatest learning inhibitors that challenge students. Traditional instruments of evaluation are more supplementary in learning centered environments rather than dominant means of assessing learning. Authentic learning requires high levels of engagement, sharing and willingness to self examine. Critical reflection and making meaning through reflection is preeminent to the learning process. It is this nature and dynamic of education and skill development that makes the transitioning process more demanding.

The transition from high school to the Health and Human Services program requires many adjustments that some students navigate more successfully than others. Not only are the content and context of learning different from high school but the approaches to learning or learning processes are also different.

Different Approaches to Learning

In the program, students were exposed to different approaches to learning. Gone is the chalk and talk approach with the teacher being the expert on knowing. In essence, modes of delivery, inquiry, assessment and achievement are varied in meeting individual learning needs and learning styles. Through increasing choice of how learning is best experienced by each learner and considering preferences for learning, the college attempts to practice the view, values and approach that one size does not fit all. Student participants expressed an awareness of the difference in learning approaches:

I wasn't aware until I was out of high school that there were many types of approaches to learning and not just auditory. (Female 6)

People are realizing that we don't learn all the same way. (Female 5)

Among approaches to learning in the human services program, reflection for understanding content, critiquing premises and self awareness are introduced and fostered. Dialectical approaches of engagement help students develop narratives of understanding and make connections between previous and new learning. Rather than parroting memorized content or faculty, students engage in making meaning of words and language that for many is taken for granted. The rationale for collaborative learning is discussed and the process of what effective collaboration looks and feels like is experienced through simulated situations.

To further illustrate different approaches to learning in the program, I will describe briefly several of the learning experiences that students encounter in their coursework. The photo monograph construct is a visual synthesis of concepts introduced throughout the semester. Students must present evidence of their conceptualization and relevance pertaining to personal growth work. The photo-monograph assesses conative learning by having students create a visual affect symbolizing and synthesizing their understanding of course content in the personal growth/self awareness and interpersonal insights courses. This approach has been very helpful in assessing and determining the scope and depth of student engagement in self awareness work.

Another unique learning experience is “the adopted child”. This learning process integrates helping application skills; that is, open ended questioning, knowledge regarding the art of helping and scratch notes from individuals discussing the stages of their development from childhood through adolescence. The ethical concerns of confidentiality and risk of harm are weighed in terms of this learning process. Students identify their learner in order to complete parallel course work with shared narratives regarding their learners’ developmental journey. In essence it is about making meaning of concepts and theories pertaining to their studies of human development. The purpose of this approach is numerous in that the student cannot succeed unless they are able to authentically engage with their learner. My premise is that interest in human service education does not in and of itself translate to positive regard for others. The process of building a relationship of trust can be long and rigorous. The viewpoint that those we help are indeed our learners perhaps may be a new approach in the helping profession. However it is a very powerful and permeating experience for students fully engaged.

Another experience, authoring in the form of a report, is at the highest level or analysis, reflection and synthesis. Evidence of what was learned, how it was learned and validated moves students' work beyond assignment-based to research and project-based.

In terms of other programs, there are similarities and differences to approaches of applied learning in part due to the nature and culture of programs. However, many of the approaches to learning described here are exclusive to the Health and Human Services program. Some student participants articulated how learning in their program differed from learning in other programs:

When I took the diploma in tourism, not once were we asked anything about ourselves. It was never anything to do with you (Female 3)

When I went to IT (information technology,) it was like high school. You did not need any self-directedness (Male 1)

Personalities of faculty, their domains of expertise, creativity and the quality of their engagement influence the experience of students significantly. The availability of time, funds that support innovation and field work experiences impact quantitatively and qualitatively on the students' learning experiences.

Students experience approaches to learning in the Health and Human Services program that differs from those experienced in high school and in other community college programs. Among these approaches are developing self-awareness, reflection for understanding, critique, a dialectical approach and collaborative learning. These approaches can be further differentiated into distinctive modes of learning.

Modes of Learning

The modes of learning that students experience in their first year of human services can be divided into three broad, distinct but overlapping categories: instrumental learning, communicative learning and transformative learning. In their discussion about the distinctiveness of their first year studies, students revealed all three modes of learning.

Instrumental Learning

Instrumental learning is grounded in our relationship to the environment, other people and status achievement respectively. This dynamic of learning is “means to ends” seeking to control and manipulate the environment to one’s benefit. It is more results driven rather than other oriented as long as outcomes have been achieved. Instrumental learning is intentional on the part of the student to engage in skill mastery learning. Typically, instrumental learning is technical and procedural. For example, to accomplish Goal A, follow steps 1, 2 and 3.

Students generally know what they want and have a plan on how they are going to go about achieving their educational plan. To illustrate, Female 5’s comments about goal – setting and time management reflects instrumental learning:

You have to know your work and know what you are doing. They are not going to just pass you. And time management is a big thing because if you fall behind and can’t manage your time, then you are toast.

Female 2 appreciated some of the instrumental dimensions of the program:

It (the program) covered everything: how to resource information, career searching focused a lot on life skills (Female 2)

Students want to change work or welfare situations and gain some sense of control over their life. Their conscious needs are instrumental and therefore they may resist transformative processes of occupational education. Certainly self awareness and interpersonal processes are inherent in the school of Health and Human Services. In terms of knowledge competence, the student may resolve to write what they assume faculty want rather than taking the time to reflect upon content or premise in order to give meaning that generates awareness, insights and perspective. Demonstrating psycho motor competence is also attainable without experiencing transformation. Cultural mindset shifts from authority-centered to relationship-centered requires rigorous reflective processes of introspection, retrospection, premise reflection and process reflection. Instrumentally speaking, concepts need to be understood and transferred to social situations in order for one to apply knowledge competence to practice.

Some of the students were aware of the limitations of the exclusive use of instrumental thinking:

A lot of people are looking for a job title as "end all be all" instead of looking at their strengths. They see the money and importance of position driven by ego need rather than looking in to discover their strengths (Male1)

Although a degree of instrumental learning is required in the program and is consistent with the historical context of adult education of retraining and upgrading technical skills, this learning mode is not the most predominant. In comparison, communicative and transformational learning are even more important. Typically, students come to the program with limited prior exposure to communicative and transformative learning.

Communicative Learning

Communicative learning is the interactive process of finding meaning in written and non verbal language, content and the interpersonal quality of our communications with others. It is meta-communication in that we examine how we communicate with others in social situations. Language, concepts and theories of course work create communication barriers for many students. The regular use of metaphors, analogies, narratives, symbols, oral presentations and explanation play a central role in the logic of communicative learning. Dialogue occurs when the transaction is received, understood and reciprocated through the student being fully participatory. It is the dynamic of understanding others. This process of learning is best achieved through face to face engagement and communicative strategies to being understood and understanding others.

The open forum approach I enjoyed. Not something I am used to but found it more stimulating. I felt I was contributing to discussion and dialogue. The process was very interactive. (Female 5)

I liked the second semester because we worked in different groups and people's true colors came out in the end. I'm thinking we are all in human services and many people cannot work in groups. (Female 2)

First year is all about sharing and finding authentic voice. (Female 5)

You were encouraged to talk to the teacher which is kind of bizarre because I was not used to that. Come see me ... the open door policy (Female 6)

For students, authentic learning and the desire to arrest ignorance cannot be realized until they begin self realization processes of critically thinking about the meaning of symbolic interactions. For many students this conscious raising is not realized in isolation. When students are encouraged, valued and engaged where they actually are, trust is built and the greater purposes of

education can be realized. For the most part many of the focus group participants expressed these views and experienced meaningful learning that created positive change within.

Transformative Learning

Learning is a broad concept situated in a socio-cultural context. The processes and antecedents of learning are not merely the result of activities or novel events. Learning is not neutral or detached from our biological constitution or social history. In transformative learning, students reinterpret an old or current experience from a new set of expectations or discovered awareness, thus giving a new meaning and perspective to their history. To illustrate this idea, Male 1 related how his thoughts about learning were transformed. It was no longer enough to go through the motions or simply follow someone else's plan according to a rigid schedule:

When I returned to school I had to give up on thinking about age and time lines.

Had to start thinking does it really matter what stage and when I hit certain goal.

I will achieve when I'm ready. (Male 1)

Transformative learning is the shift away from cognitive and social rigidity shaped through passive socialization and indoctrination processes. This shift is a discontinuation of passive compliance, regurgitated language and guarded facts. Rather than merely adapting to changing circumstances and producing the same old results, transformative learning emphasizes the need for new ways of thinking and rethinking (Mezirow, 1991).

It is a re-examination of where we have been, how we currently understand self and the meaning given to people, places, events and phenomenon. Transformative learning must not be determined by moral, political and economic imperatives of our day but through rigorous processes of values reasoning and critical inquiry. In order for those seeking education to achieve a quality of

life, they must be able to participate in this collaborative and self directed process. In order to self determine, we must be able to name our experiences and understand, divorced from passive acceptance and naïve trust. The meaningful life is the conscious life and thus purposeful. It is the ability and willingness to shift perspectives and integrate multiple ways of understanding. Therefore transformative learning balances instrumental and communicative learning as the ego balances self interest and moral imperatives.

It also helped us with empathy. We have already experienced a huge amount of growth and reflection on our lives that's changed the person inside. (Female 4)

Students also reported transformations in their motivations that resulted from participation in the program. Often, their motivations became increasingly intrinsic:

Developing more intrinsic desire to achieve your hopes, dreams and desires. (Female 1)

Through transformative learning experiences, students also became more aware of the broader purposes served by their studies:

You need to advocate for yourself and others. (Female 2)

Despite these benefits, engaging with transformative learning can be a struggle for some students. Student focus group participants acknowledged the difficulties experienced by some of their peers:

In resisting this transformative model of adult education you were merely adapting compliance to the situation which was not meaningful. (Female 6)

You have to be emotional and cognitive ready or resistance will make new learning difficult. (Female 7)

Occupational education is often seen by consumers and those in the business of demand and supply as utilitarian. The nature and diversity of exchanges, created needs and life opportunities are dictating the need for life- long learning and transferable skills. To this end the consumer must realize that achieving their ends is not merely instrumental. Regurgitated and scripted learning will not ensure employability. Self awareness and owning the quality of relating to others is another dimension of the educational experience that employers look for. This conjoint dynamic of occupational education attempts to resolve false promises of education to realize progressive ideas of the past through transformative learning. The experience must not be labelled or constructed as opposing dichotomies or superior approaches. Nor can the ideas and spirit of transformative learning be monopolized by political or business agendas. The value of students experience must ensure that they have fully and willingly participated in this inclusion, collaboration, critical conscious raising and self determined approach to ensure well being. The consumer must not be at any one's mercy or grace but equally engage in this transformative process of arresting false consciousness which amounts to substance and value added education.

Value Added Beyond Course Credits

Processes of critical reflection, perspective development and self assessment work unintentionally as pseudo therapeutic for many learners. First year experience is a journey of enhanced self awareness and rethinking of how you perceive self and others.

Learning is meaning focused and the learner is challenged to consider relationships objectively. From a theoretical and ethical stance, a premise of helping is that you cannot expect clients to take charge of their lives as long as you are resistant and indifferent to the need for self awareness that should lead to self determination. In general persons tend not to make meaning of their experiences with any depth of insight. However in reflection for meaning persons gain deeper understanding of taken-for-granted situations and events. This enables the individual to build upon what they actually

know in terms of cognitive development. In addition, sharing narratives of life themes corresponding to course themes helps associate subjects of discussion with the life experiences. Those learners most accepting of looking inward and adaptive to self examination contributed more to collaborative work and others' learning. They experience and engage in processes of self realization and conscious rising. Such rigorous processes and results are the tangible evidence of transformative learning and its emancipating affect upon those authentically engaged.

The learning experience for some went well beyond the successful completion of course work. It was arresting cumulative burdens and awaking to the possibilities of self determination.

If something was to happen and I had to go on with what I have gotten up to this point, it is going to have a ripple effect for the rest of my life. Self confidence and recognition of accomplishment replacing doubts, labelling, and things I have been burdened with all my life. (Female 2)

Experiencing the process of viewing self from a vantage point in order to assess ones response and affect of social exchanges was reconciliatory:

The idea that each person must reassess conflicts to identify their behaviours within the conflict and how they may have contributed to interpersonal tension or chronic malfunction was a perspective or view that many of us could not relate to. (Female 1)

Owning your part as to why situations happened and what part you played has helped me as a Mom. You begin to consider the origins of family malfunctions and start breaking cycles. (Female 3)

Making meaning of language and words and investigating dispositional readiness helped chip away at the rigidity of mind:

You had to rethink the schematics or stereotypes used to explain, identify or categorize people, places and things and realize your own prejudices that you denied you ever had.

(Male 1)

The transferability and broadness of learning and growth had relevance across the lifespan:

It would be beneficial for anyone from 5 to 90 years old. It is life skills, self discovery. (Female

1)

I don't think it would matter who took the course. It would be beneficial for anyone and everyone. (Female 4)

Learner centered meant that learning was current to the social realities and life scripts of students:

Everything you learned was relevant. You could apply it to any aspect of your life. (Female 3)

Identifying, examining and critical reflecting on attachment qualities helped students consider the paradox of family dynamics:

It has helped me as a Mom also. I wish I had it before I became a Mom....begin to consider families of origin and start breaking cycles. Parental competencies and the art of nurturing...I am more capable of. (Female 4)

In hindsight these focus group participants who experience the rigorous approaches to self awareness and critical reflection are excelling in year two studies. The process of balancing knowledge acquisition and psycho social growth with applied practices enables the student to be fully engaged in the changing nature of occupational education. Faculty's role in the learning process is that of egalitarian rather than authoritative.

Beyond the language of positivism and progressive education is the resolve, determination and vigilance to engage students to self realize how to find meaning and holistic value in their educational experiences to enhance employability and keener awareness of self.

Students who are ready to engage in the struggles of emancipatory learning begin to rethink the meaning of education and experience a mindset shift realizing the transformative dimensions of learning. They begin to connect false consciousness with their actual educational attainment and perceived social worlds prior to this experience.

Previous Education and Readiness

In its infancy, the community college system in Nova Scotia is a bonus baby of occupational education and skills development. Its predecessor, vocational high school offering essential vocational skills in the trades was replaced with a collegial model of diverse post secondary programming. General Math and English would not suffice with the proliferation of new program growth. In particular, knowledge, currency, innovation, ethics, creativity and self awareness were competencies embedded in the new curriculum.

Although many trade programs continued to be offered at certain sites of the community college, industry standards and global competition demands a more rigorous technological and academic challenge for community college students. Gone are the days of vocational education and mediocre mind sets of “I just want a job”. However, many stake holders external of the community college have not caught up to this new reality and are surprised or confused by the shift in program offerings and academic standards expected of community college students. It is within this context that we need to consider previous education and readiness. For example academic English is required in health and human services programs. It is important for student success due to the academic natures of many first year courses. Volume of content is high and the pace by which

information is covered is very rapid. Another noticeable shift in terms of information processing is reflection on the meaning of what is communicated. Students can no longer merely memorize content or attend classes infrequently and expect educational success. Process learning requires engagement whether physically or through social networks.

Collaboration, problem solving, modifying information or designs and critical reflection are how learning is experienced within the community college. Many students are taken back by the academic demands, the volume of reading, writing levels and types of writing for industry and perspective development expected. Many students who have the university experience comment on the pace, learning activity levels and volume of information covered. In terms of meaning driven learning they are expected to be present for a significant percentage of each semester as learning is activity based and process driven. Most are not reading or comprehending at grade 12 levels academically. This is reflected in the reading and comprehension writing that students produce and the number of requests for tutors and referrals to the writing center on campus. Analytical, synthesis and critical thinking skills are noticeably absent as are library literacy skills reflective of information technology and new media. This is evident from samples of work produced and the quality of academic articles they are requested to locate.

The types of writing genres and volumes of writing expected stress many students who did little writing in secondary education:

I found that I did not have academic writing skills to write reports, lengthy papers and putting my thoughts together. (Female 5)

Meeting students where they are means that the collaborative learning process is far from realized for some students. They feel the burden of educational lag when working in groups:

I was frustrated by the illiteracy levels of many of my classmates. I became resentful because they were taking away from the quality of work I was capable of. I felt the burden of having to show these students how to approach assignments and articulate responses. (Female 2)

Self directedness is more significant than its language implies and speaks to a history of scholastic success of which many students have only minimally experienced:

I did not learn to be self directed prior to coming to the college. It was a shock going from one system to another. You just cannot send people off and hope they fare okay. I thought when looking back that you are on your own and you have no idea as to what you are doing. (Female 6)

Passive socialization and minimalist attitudes on the part of some learners resulted in prescribed learning and recipe knowledge:

I was socialized to expect college to be the next step of my education. I was told what I needed but never knew what I wanted. To be happy I had to reach certain goals set by other people instead of self choice. (Male 1)

The knowledge economy and the business of education has forced the creation and ongoing development of new models of providing educational services and understanding more precisely the demographics of diverse educational consumers. There is a greater ethical and social consciousness resurfacing beyond mere politicking and language games. The community college's resolve is meeting students where they are, however this in no way means that we continue the practice of hit and miss results. There is accountability of the institution, support staff, faculty, the student and others to cooperatively achieve self awareness, growth purposeful learning and gainful employment.

Theories of Psychosocial Development

It was anticipated that Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and Marcia's work on identity statuses as an outgrowth of Erikson's theory might be reflected in student participants' responses. As part of their coursework, students study theories of psychosocial development, so it is not surprising that they frame experiences in this way even though they may not consistently identify specific theoretical concepts and principles. Among the recurring themes derived from psychosocial development was Erikson's notion of identity crisis or "the intense period of struggle that young adults may experience in the course of forming an identity" (Arnett, 2007, p. 471). Recall that Erikson used the term crisis in a different sense from the common usage of this term. An identity crisis is not necessarily a negative event and may even be positive. It is simply a life event that catalyzes change.

Identity Crises

When sharing their reasons/motivations for joining the program, student participants frequently referred to a series of crises that precipitated major life transitions. The beneficial outcome of storm and strife is pruning, rethinking, reshaping, positive growth and a self conscious resolve to re-evaluate felt needs and what is desired. From a developmental perspective the social and moral imperatives of duty, expectation and more significantly self conscious decision making processes moves the individual through cycles of storm, strife and tranquility.

Female 2 was experiencing burnout from a previous job and was assessing her welfare needs, self dependency and educational requirements in order to secure gainful and meaningful employment.

For me I was in the middle of a career change. I burned out of a business and did not know what was going on. I was off work on sick leave so I needed to know what to do with my life.

(Female 2)

Pregnancy was the crisis that stimulated Female 4 to examine her life options over a three year period. Once she joined the program, she was fully committed to her choice. Others found themselves dissatisfied in dead end jobs and longed for careers and the commitment that came with them.

Identity Statuses

James Marcia's work on identity development has been extensive in attempting to discover empirical evidence of identity conflict that impacts an individual's capacity to consider options or choice as conative dynamics of the decision making process. By identity, Marcia means a self structure that gives individuals an ongoing sense of who they are based upon whom they have been and whom they can imagine themselves being in the future. Referencing Marcia's (1966, 1980, 2001) identity statuses framework, I wanted to discover whether student narratives reflect any of the four identity statuses. These identity statuses are determined by the two process criteria of exploration and commitment in life domains of occupation, ideology, social cultural context and relationship identities. The four identity statuses are Identity Achievement, Moratorium, Foreclosure and Identity Diffusion.

Moratorium Moratorium is an identity status that involves exploration but no commitment (Arnett, 2007). When experiencing moratorium, students explore different possibilities but are uncertain of their ultimate choice. They are both struggling and resisting the self verifying process of critical reflection. The developmental logic of moratoria provides thoughtful insight and positive consideration of not viewing exiting from a program, campus or institution as attrition or

failure. Questions of what happens and how leave takers invest their time-out are foundational questions (Ochberg, 1986). Moratoria may not involve exploration but could also manifest reluctance to self determine and blaming others for a current crisis the persons may be experiencing. Some students accept the least objectionable option in lieu of going nowhere.

Female 5 arrived at the community college campus in a state of moratorium. She had not therapeutically recognized or addressed developmental issues of childhood and adolescence that are often irritated or resurface as a result of transformative learning processes. She had entered the General Arts and Science stream because it gave meaning to her family history of addictions and attachment issues. GEAS provided developmental moratorium for Female 5 to become aware of just how significant her family history had impacted her choice of the human service stream.

I have changed career paths five times since I submitted my application (Female 5)

Through their journaling and in informal conversations, students over the past few years shared with me reasons for discontinuing the program. I recall one student who anticipated that a year at community college would be more of an exploratory year, a relatively stress-free moratorium. The student was surprised at the level of demands and stress entailed in the program and was not prepared for this experience.

Students experiencing moratorium are currently in the midst of self worth, purpose and identity struggle. If their perceptions are distorted, however, more attention may need to be directed to self-awareness processes in hopes of helping them make conscious and ethical decisions regarding good fit and readiness for any particular career path. It is understandable that students would be reluctant to participate in a study of this nature that seeks to understand the complexities of student success and achievement. They tend to be concrete in their thinking and there tend to be a high degree of cognitive rigidity and flat affect. As well there is little tolerance for grey areas of

reasoning or for multiple views of examining social issues or course content. Many learners who do exit before the end of the first semester are somewhat distracted with opposite parent issues or difficulty with interpersonal relations. They tend to be irritated with personal growth or transformative learning and do not see the need for themselves to be engaged in self awareness and levels of conscious raising.

I recall one student who confessed unwillingness to explore self and wanted in no way to relive the past. That student was happy to have survived the past the first time he/she experienced it. Another student shunned the ethical scrutiny and critical reflective work. This student recognized that she/he was still in crisis and was overly stressed by the level of engagement required in the course work. This student felt the need to be protected from such scrutiny.

Our ability to give developmental meaning to many learners' struggles, absenteeism, chronically late assignments, non participation and other behaviours would help the entire team to be proactive in not only meeting students where they are but understanding the significance as to what the phrase actually means in terms of predicting success or anticipating early interventions. In the case of foreclosure status the student's perception of self, choice and ability may be dominantly influenced by others.

Foreclosure Students experiencing foreclosure may be strongly committed to their position but their acting upon decision may not have been arrived at via self investigation and exploration. They tend to accept social expectations of others and moral imperatives they feel most comfortable with and socially rewarded. Although many may have been good student in previous educational experiences they also require transitional time to adjust to making meaning of their learning. Because of previous expectations of being the compliant student they may not appreciate self examination and critical reflection.

Some did not know why they were there. They knew they needed to go to school so they decided to take human services. There are still persons in second year studies that should be asking themselves if human services are really something that they want to do. They are just there. (Male 1)

I recall a student who realized that he/she could have been better prepared and taken more time to explore available options. Going to college after high school was simply the expected path and there was parental pressure to make this choice. The human services program was selected more by chance than authentic desire or knowledge about what this choice entailed.

Both testimonies reflect the core issues of foreclosure in that decision making to attend post secondary education for many is reactive and normative expectation rather than arrived at through an intense exploratory and reflective process that is self directed and self determined. This is not to devalue the support, encouragement and guidance provided by those supporting the student. However, if the quality of scaffolding does not achieve the autonomy to weigh life alternatives then in many cases these students will struggle with transformative processes.

Some learners continue behaviours of survival and adaptation to new environments and new challenges. Being authentic is not necessarily a concern of theirs and pre reflective history tends to be minimal. They tend to regurgitate new language rather than find meaning through critical reflection and examining of their values and belief systems.

Identity Diffusion Students experiencing identity diffusion share in common a lack of commitment and meaningful exploration. They are whatever seems advantageous for them to be in the moment. They struggle to articulate the significance or lack thereof of their moral position on

issues and lack cognitive complexity. Fear and doubt tends to dominant ego identity and therefore compensating may result in proving others wrong rather than valuing dialectical processes.

Many students are motivated to get the work done. Do what you have to. They were driven by weight given to assignments rather than authentic learning.

(Male 2)

I believe that much of the problems that students have with succeeding is they do not understand what they are getting into. They are not aware of the introspective and critical reflective focus of the program and are not ready or do not feel comfortable engaging face to face in such personal and intense interactive processes. (Female7)

Engagement for intentional learning whether on line or face to face requires the student to be in a place where they have dealt with previous social issues and trauma. At least a third of students arrive at first year human services wearing the battle scars of life situations. This is reflective from a journal entry of a former student.

Although presentation propositions present the opportunity for each student to showcase orally and visually the depth of insight, reflective meaning, self perspective and understanding of communicative learning the outcomes of this exercise are less than transformative. The gruelling reflective process perhaps generates guilt and shame and their perception that somehow faculty have a crystal ball so come clean. Regardless of identity status all students are affected by the experience.

For many of the students participating in the focus group they were conscious of the struggles they had been through. Although they may never have given the reflective meaning to

their life script prior to experiencing the transformative processes of adult education their sharing reflects the decision making struggle that is unavoidable in self determining your education and life.

Identity Achievement The student has been through a crisis or decision making struggle and are self acting on ideological and occupational goals. They are acting on what they have concluded or believe. They are pretty much on track and need only appropriate guidance. They need little in the way of remedial developmental work. They experience transitional challenges however their adaptation is less resistant than other statuses.

I was going through a career transition in my life. I knew I wanted to go back to school and was already engaged in self discovery. I was sort of having conflict with who I was as a person just discovering what I liked and what I was good at. I knew I had to make some kind of change in my life. (Female 1)

For me I was in the middle of a career change also. I was experiencing burnout from business and did not know what was going on. I did not have my grade 12 so that is where I started. The Adult learning program prepared me for first year human services and I have never swayed. (Female 2)

Available funding enabled me the opportunity to return to school. I was in a dead end job. At work I started sticking up for myself and I knew it wasn't really for me. (Male 1)

Unlike diffusion identity these students shared bits of their struggles that influenced change and conscious decision making processes of owning their problems. Their psycho social had achieved equilibrium and they were acting on their needs in a proactive manner. Due to the nature of human service education and perhaps the low regard of this great work that is needed, program level of difficulty is dismissed by many learners and their supports. Perhaps attitude and mindsets

have not caught up to 21st century adult learning. Some of the indicators of identity achievement are heightened social consciousness, active self advocacy, self reflection, career and self exploratory work and self realization of the need for change and significance of decisions to be made. These qualities can be identified in learners making Marcia's theoretical framework significant and helpful in the college's challenges of meeting students where they are, supporting transitional needs, students' right to self determine and effective processes that will enhance life possibilities.

Gender Influences

In terms of gender and role identity, females predominantly outnumber males in first year human service programs. The ratio historically and consistent over the past 15 years has been 4 to 5. The ratio was seven females to two males in the student focus group. Owing to patterns of socialization, attachment dynamics and emerging social identities, human service education is still dominated by female students. In building relationships of trust with female students and overcoming gender barriers to engagement, I have been able to identify significant psychosocial factors that impede self-realization and goal attainment. The low ratio of male students and male participants in the research also reflects gender socialization. In many cases, individuals are deeply unaware of the socio-cultural reality that shapes their lives resulting in unreflective compliance to social and cultural norms. The ratio of female to male participants in both the faculty and CSS/AC's focus groups was 6 to 3. Owing to the size of the groups and their familiarity with each other, I chose not to identify the gender of participants in order to protect confidentiality and anonymity. A concern was that individual participants could be more easily identified if gender was associated with quotes from the two groups

Thematic Analysis of Faculty Focus Group

The faculty focus group consisted of 7 faculty members in total representing general arts and science human service stream as well as first and second year human service programs. It was

noted by the moderator that the faculty focus group was more engaged in the discussion regarding student readiness and animated with their thoughts regarding questions posed and issues raised. Ten guiding questions were the catalysts for discussion with each faculty member providing their interpretations and viewpoints of questions and how they experienced human service students. Much of the discussion centered on varying motivations for students choosing human service education as a career path. Among topics frequently discussed were the significance of being self aware and trusting the process of engagement. No one attempted to theorize the issues of psycho social and academic readiness but rather shared their actual experiences and observations of students related to motivation, developmental age, learning challenges and identity formation. From these most frequent commentaries and recurring themes we were able to frame four themes and sub themes for analysis of this focus group.

Motivation for Enrolling in the Program

Focus group faculty participants were asked what they believe are the reasons students choose health and human services as a program of study. Of the seven participants those most vocal were able to articulate passionately and insightfully why they believed students enrolled in human service studies. Analysis of these reasons revealed underlying motivations that could be classified as instrumental (students intentionally engage in skill mastery learning), or helping (intra-psychic factors, personalities and social histories) that identifies and explains multiple reasons why typologies of students enrol in the program.

Instrumental Motivation

What is attractive perhaps for all students who apply for various programs within the community college is proximics to their home base, subsidized tuition, and short duration of studies, applied learning, quality work experiences and the reported percentage of graduated students who

are able to secure gainful employment in their concentration of study or related field. Faculty participants shared a number of these instrumental motivations:

Jobs in a geographical area requiring human service diploma and training are factors that influence decisions of certain profiles to apply in order to satisfy an end. (Faculty 2)

A cheaper educational and career path since they can be in and out with a minimal of two years of post secondary education and skill development.

(Faculty 1)

Human services first year is offered at most of our campuses. Geographical convenience instead of moving away from home and driving distance is also appealing. (Faculty 4)

Chosen for them by funding bodies as an interesting way to receive credits and boost self worth. (Faculty 3)

Instrumental motivation is consistent with the economic drivers shaping and influencing curriculums and programs at varying levels. Also, welfare needs and individual limitations influence needs, desires and intentions for learning. Post modern educational philosophies and social justice can present conflict for some learners who only want the skills necessary to pursue career change, not personal change.

In the context of health and human services this instrumental motivation reflects only two thirds of evaluation processes. Skill mastery is not only technical and applied but also self reflective and other centered. Students resistant of introspection and mining for insight may score high on knowledge exploration but may lack authentic empathy towards others. They are outcome driven but see little need to engage in reflection and personal growth work. That is, success in academics does not necessarily equate to interpersonal skills or empathy development.

Helping Motivation

Helping is universal and depending on the social context you are referring to, we are all engaged in helping interactions. What is distinct about human service helping is greater marginalization we encounter with many of the populations for whom we provide human services support. Certainly there has been a rethinking of human service education and practice over time that has necessitated the penning of codes of conduct and ethics, greater regulation and scrutiny by government bodies, competition from the private sector and the value and advantages of the research enterprise. Thus, reasons for wanting to help others are examined and consciousness-raising is expected in programs so that the student is able to step back from self and observe how they perceive others, understanding personal troubles and how their helping history has unfolded from childhood. When encountering stressful situations, unconscious motivations or needs often come into play. Thus, the significance of identifying helping motivations cannot be overstated since many people engage in injurious practices as certified human services practitioners. The faculty focus group members identified characteristics of students who expressed helping motivations:

I have always been told that I am good at helping others. People are attracted to me; they want to talk to me. Many students have ongoing problems in their lives and helping others is a way to cope with their own unrest. (Faculty 6)

They are easy to talk to and are caring people. In other words they are naturalist. (Faculty 4)

Faculty participants also noted that both lack and abundance of support in students' social histories could influence helping motivation:

Not receiving the help and support they needed, they wanted to make a definitive change. (Faculty 2)

Having received help and support in the past and wanting to give back is another reason why students apply to human services. (Faculty 3)

One's helping history and concern for others needs to be examined so that good intentions become ethical and competent approaches of helping others. The balance between helping and instrumental needs is the issue students are confronted within first year human services studies. Despite how the individual life has been perceptually shaped over time, external forces often attract students towards human service education without sufficient self exploration and inner awareness engagement. Despite the proliferation of self help and personal growth services, the concepts, ideas and processes of transformative learning balance self needs and the need to help others in order that the helper is more able to facilitate ongoing change in self and engage others in their own processes of change and achievement. The importance of motivation for enrolling in the program and students' awareness of their motivations is linked to principles of adult learning (andragogy). These principles form the philosophical basis of the program.

Learning Androgogical Approaches

Faculty participants spoke at considerable length about a number of essential androgogical principles that underpinned the learning philosophy of first year human services.

Engagement

Faculty focus group members recognized engagement as one of the most important androgogical principles that first year human services students needed to embrace. The significance of engagement is that it is positively correlated with new insights and awareness. The difficulty for most students in being comfortable with this dimension of learning may be due to the ebb and flow of identity struggles that reflect personality and temperament. Expressed tendencies reflect the meaning students give to new social situations as accepting or anxiety provoking. Deep and

meaningful learning is experienced when the student as our learner is valued although very few students have life experiences of reciprocal engagement. Passive resistance and avoidance are challenged by paradigm shifts from traditional curriculum delivery to active engagement. Faculty comments reflect both the benefits and challenges of active engagement:

Students who start to engage over time start to gain confidence in their self and abilities.

(Faculty 1)

Sometimes people come with unresolved issues in their lives. Critical reflection and looking in makes it very difficult for them to stay engaged. (Faculty 4)

The ability and willingness to engage in reciprocal feedback impacts the quality of learning and meaningful change. (Faculty 1)

Student perceptual distortion factors into readiness. I perceive that I am ready to engage however when identities are questioned, cracks begin to appear in some learners personas.

(Faculty 2)

Engagement is a strong predictor of student success and there are multiple reasons why engaging and connecting with processes, course work and authentic learning are a struggle for many students. Academic and reflective meaning challenges are eased when students are willing to take risks and struggle with their learning. Engagement is an intense investment of sharing, passion and resolve and requires trust and mutual regard from both parties.

Self Awareness

According to Mezirow (1991), "The mind can protect itself against anxiety by dimming awareness" (p. 15). The self awareness process either self directed or group facilitated can have varying results depending on process, self need and considered relevance to educational pursuits. A

presupposition of human service work is that helpers need to know self. The process of self awareness cannot be intellectualized nor is it intended to be therapeutic. Self awareness is a key dimension of transformative learning and is about understanding our experiences. It is the dynamic process of intentional learning and reflection upon assumptions to understanding meaning. In essence, self awareness emphasizes critical thought and reflection which catalyzes conative learning.

Self awareness is extremely challenging for any student and their motivation ties into their readiness to engage in self exploration. (Faculty 6)

Students who were most ready to understand themselves and had thought about what it was they wanted to be: What are my strengths, competencies, passions and interests and as a result of this, they know where they are going. This is a key dimension of readiness. They have a vision of helping that is not naïve or romanticized. (Faculty 4)

If I know self, I should be in a better or more effective position to support others.

(Faculty 1)

Our philosophical approach is to provide opportunity for students to gain knowledge and awareness of themselves. (Faculty 4)

It is clear from multiple references and social context of self awareness that this reflective process enables learning to be meaningful by ensuring that the student engages in this mind set shift from passive socialization to self inquiry. Self awareness leads to self realization and metaphorically is a detoxifying struggle for students who have not engaged in meaningful self exploration prior to enrolling in human services studies.

Making Meaning

We can only know what we have lived, observed, experienced or felt. Cumulative reservoirs of information are merely regurgitated scripts contextualized within single or multiple meaning perspectives. Language is not neutral since it is strongly connected with self identity and relating in various social situations. Primary social ecologies and larger social networks shape our thought and perceptions. This may result in culturally defined expectations that become habitual and tends to foster rigidity of mind rather than cognitive complexity. Explicit thinking goes on within the limits of what is implied or understood (Mezirow 1991). A missing dimension of acquiring language of theories, concepts and content is making meaning – how information is explained, validated and reformulated. Social conditions and context influence the ways that students regard and respond to their experiences. Meaning is an interpretation, and to make meaning is to explain or interpret experiences; in other words, give it coherence and understanding that is internalized by the learner.

The student's willingness to be open to critiquing their values and beliefs is a key behaviour of readiness. (Faculty 1)

There is an ongoing humility of what they do and they are more open to rethinking their ideas. (Faculty 3)

I'm learning how to explain what I am exposed to and experience. I didn't know people wrote books about how you feel about yourself. This is one profile of student that we encounter in first year. (Faculty 6)

Making meaning is essential for survival and accuracy of understanding. Equally important is the transformative affect of meaningful learning. However, the learner must accept the burden and impact of their ideas and interpretation of symbols and ideas expressed in language. This requires the development of cognitive complexity and a shift away from educational docility prevalent with

many students who are not critically reflective nor considered academic. Perhaps it is the absence of prior experience that disadvantages many students from experiencing transformative processes and self efficacy of meaningful learning. The difficulty in fostering meaningful learning in formal institutionalized settings is overcoming the schematic rigidity of meaning that in many instances has been nurtured and fostered in absolute ways of knowing during critical years of childhood and adolescence. The reality is that many students do not make meaning of their experiences depending on the social situation and context. With faculty and Centers for Student Success support, students are strongly encouraged to make the connection with their studies to what is meaningful to them and transfer that passion to personal growth and career pursuits.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning is relatively easy when the students learning strength is collaborative and the process and benefits of collaboration are understood. Academic collaboration is difficult to achieve because many students have not experienced the synchrony and synergy of educational group work. Every day there is the opportunity and need to work together in groups for a common purpose; therefore, it cannot be assumed that students will know how to maximize benefit from collaborative learning unless the process is studied. A question that might be raised is whether schools, workplaces and sports teams for example use inventories to evaluate individual development of collaborative behaviours. It requires self respect and healthy regard for self in order to contribute to the support and achievement of others within the group. In the human service program, information is disseminated on group processes. However, there is little developmental time to provide experiences where collaboration processes are studied, observed and participated in. Also one's collaborative history may contradict and question the ideals of collaborative learning if their experiences have been predominantly negative.

Once you commit to collaborative learning then there is much more that needs to be considered. Just how do I learn best and what skill sets will I enhance or be introduced to.

(Faculty 6)

We had to learn from experience that we would have to transition learners from where they were to androgical approaches to learning. (Faculty 2)

All of the sudden you are going to take control of your learning and responsibility for your success. (Faculty 1)

Collaborative learning transcends the post secondary and applied learning environment. It shows up in the workplace. (Faculty 4)

It is good that faculty have relationships with each other because of our objectivism and creative approaches to engaging our work. (Faculty 7)

Collaborative learning must be about proven practices and learning models that harmonize the actions of language in order to actualize the arguments and claims purported for its benefit and enhancement of achieving goals and interpersonal relationships. Mastery of collaborative learning is essential for faculty since many learners do not benefit optimally from this method of problem solving. This in part is due to the lack of engaged interest and the tendency for certain personalities to dominate the group rather than supporting and encouraging others to contribute their ideas and thoughts on the task to be achieved. Our failures in achieving authentic collaboration and understanding of others reflects the fundamental error of expecting students to engage in the process of collaborative learning from “storming to performing” without modeling competencies of how the process must be experienced. The irony is that many who want to help others fail miserably at this approach more so than in other disciplines. Perhaps in part because we expect students

pursuing human service careers to already possess some interpersonal qualities enabling collective benefit from this most natural way of learning.

In summary, when addressing principles of adult learning or androgogical approaches, faculty provide a rationale for the place of these principles or approaches in the human services program. Further, they acknowledged benefits and challenges for students attempting to adopt them.

Predominant Learning Challenges

Although faculty addressed challenges associated with engagement, self-awareness, making meaning and collaborative learning, special attention was directed to perennial academic challenges associated with reflecting for meaning. These represent persistent challenges that are encountered year after year and major cultural shifts in learning for students transitioning from high school to college.

Academic Challenges

One of the challenges the community colleges face in incorporating its values, beliefs and philosophies with prevailing ideas and trends in post secondary education is dealing with the developmental needs of students. These needs pertain to core academic competencies of reading comprehension, writing styles, library literacy, theory of knowledge and foundational academic math. All learners whether recent high school graduates or adult learners who have acquired their high school diploma through adult learning programs must validate these core academic competencies through oral presentations and artefacts they have produced.

In order to ensure educational and employment equity, faculty are searching for ways to evaluate learning. They are attempting to apply a behavioural rubric that identifies developmental progression related to professional integrity and competencies. In terms of knowing, faculty

continually review learning outcomes and assessments that identify objectives of learning, how learning will be experienced by the individual, how it is authenticated, artefacts produced and confirmation that meaningful learning has been achieved by each student.

Faculty spoke about the gap between high school education and the unique approaches to human services education, especially the therapeutic and affirmation of self determination for those already engaged in self and career exploration. For faculty, the experience is about moving forward by understanding the educational philosophy of emancipatory learning. This was viewed as the college's shared responsibility to support student success to achieve civic consciousness and enhanced employability. In order to realize quality of life change, human capacity and capital development that are essential for meeting economic and societal challenges, there must be a collective resolve between all levels of education to eradicate the disparity in core academic competencies.

Faculty's reference of learning centered and philosophical shifts in adult education makes it abundantly clear that with emerging new economies and global competition that how we engage our work must consider ecological capacities and their footprint on post secondary collaborations. This includes how we understand quality of engaging others and whether we resolve to transfer these experiences and learning to real time and situations.

The challenge for faculty is meeting students where they actually are and the co – challenge of undoing passive socialization, arrested development and organic sensory barriers.

People are literally spoon fed, their learning being recipe or prescriptive. Introduce adult learning and transformative approaches to education and they do not like it too much.

(Faculty 2)

They want to avoid the struggle piece. It is anxiety provoking for them for faculty to say conceive the idea of create the approach yourself. (Faculty 1)

I think it goes back to the gap we talk about with some high school graduates but not unique only to this age cohort. The distinct emphasis of conative readiness and applied meaning of human service education is very different from undergraduate studies in terms of core competencies needed. (Faculty 1)

Do we want a bunch of people who can regurgitate because they have learned throughout their scholastic life to produce what the teacher wants or do we want people who can showcase creativity, problem solving and application of theories, concepts and to critique the indoctrination they have experienced? (Faculty 3)

Knowledge exists only in the learner's ability to explain and reinterpret the meaning of an experience in their own terms. Students can get ready satisfaction from learning something new or view that learning experience as a threatening test of self worth (Mezirow 1991). In academic terms, reading, writing and developing critical consumer competencies are dominant activities of human service education and also reflect program and course outcomes. In order for new learning to occur, the student needs time to process volumes of information from multiple sources, make connections with new information and apply this understanding and awareness to problem and project based learning. It is this depth and quality of learning that epitomizes portfolio and service learning. The competitive knowledge economy dictates that core academic competencies are essential for each student to ensure that educational and employment equity are evident and obtainable for each graduate of the community college. Thus, the faculty's concern with academic challenges is justified.

Reflecting for Meaning

Students embarking on post secondary studies generally possess concrete mental representations of people, places, things and events. Use of language often times depends on how people understand words. Memorization and regurgitation of ideas should not be reinforced when it comes to applied learning and occupational education. However making meaning through reflective processes that foster insight and problem solving presents a steep learning curve for many students. Reflective learning involves assessment or reassessment of assumptions of awareness and knowing. In other words all reflection involves a critique of what is actually known. Critical reflection and analysis which are high on Bloom's Taxonomy of assessing learning requires the student to engage in abstract mental processes. The critical piece of information that is missing for faculty, upon meeting with new students, is knowing just where they actually are cognitively. If there are psycho social and academic challenges, then most of these students find themselves in trouble with course work from the very beginning.

Reflection for content, premise or process helps the student to understand and explain why the learning has been purposeful. The advantage of reflection for meaning fosters knowing, problem posing and problem solving. These conative skills are essential to enhancing transformative shifts in human relations and mastery of applied approaches to tasks and solutions. "Reflection upon assumptions, perceptions, values and beliefs are crucially important in learning to understanding meaning" (Mezirow 1991, p. 37).

Reflective writing and generating insights into self and others through journaling may be one of the most difficult adjustments students have to make. (Faculty 5)

I think when you take the scrutiny and self examination out of the learning process then we all fail. (Faculty 4)

If we are engaging in deconstruction processes of learning then we better make sure there is time allotted to model that process for students. (Faculty 6)

The process of altering the old and creating new is known as insight and innovation. New knowledge involves a negotiation and transformation of past beliefs (Mezirow 1991). There are two things happening in first year: the process of enhancing self awareness which triggers many feelings and anxieties. The second is the stress of academics within the context of reflection for content and premise.

A number of students develop through discourses of interpersonal insights and personal growth which can create balance between cognitive and affect which is a deepening to know why. (Faculty 1)

Not being able to write an academic paper is less problematic than a student coming to you and stating that I am finding it hard to have empathic feelings for others. (Faculty 4)

Academic standards apply across the board regardless of school. However there is nothing like the inner investigation of self. (Faculty 3)

Concepts and language are much more likely to be examined critically and transformed by reflection than perspective taking alone (Mezirow 1991). Reflecting for meaning is a time consuming process that is ongoing, requiring developmental time for students. It cannot be developed solely by attending workshops or courses on reflective processes and applications but by engaging in the process. The deconstructive, constructive and creative nature of reflecting for meaning creates anxiety, irregularity and unpredictability for some students. This results, in part, from their instrumental motivation for pursuing human service education, models of delivery and

levels of relationship engagement experienced. It is an attempt to place a social value on knowing self and understanding others, apart from of social expediencies.

In terms of human service curriculum documents and course syllabus, learning outcomes state that students successful in completing course credits will demonstrate and produce valid evidence of their learning. The triad of learning competencies includes interpersonal, conceptualizing/problem solving and demonstration of skill set competencies. The facilitation – learning process is an interactive process in which learners assume a personal accountability for their own learning (Human Service Curriculum Document, 2008).

Program Outcomes

Perception of Helping

The close examination of neurology, external sensations and conative processes which enable us to use language and give meaning to symbols and ideas are perplexing for many students. It is not uncommon once engaged in various methods of examining and reflection for students to express how much they took psycho physic experiences for granted. What is evident is the black and white view many have of their social experiences as well as themselves. For faculty, the concern with a student's desire to acquire human service education in a declared area of interest is the question of how well they know self compared to how they perceive self. Corey and Corey (1983) aid human service educators' and practitioners' awareness of perceptual distortions with helping identities by identifying and discussing in depth our motives for helping others. This process of conscious awareness of self should not be solely a core principle in human service practice but all work in which we directly or indirectly impact others. Often times, clients become the helper in dual relationships.

Processes of disclosure, discovery, self awareness, therapeutic forgiveness and psycho social resolves are critical to educational institutions and industry's determination of the student's psycho social well being, good fit, ethical regard and professional competencies. Such an intense scrutiny is the college's responsibility to be vigilant in minimizing the potential harm that human service consumers could experience from those supposing to know better. The paradox of knowing one's self and others is a frustrating actuality that some resist. This reflects identity states and the nature of previous exploratory and growth work. Perhaps, the way we perceive self and what we project to others lead us to believe we are natural helpers and the principle purpose of education is the mastery of skills so that we can do what we perceive we are good at.

This idea of I like people, I can help people. When they really get into this they may discover that I really like working with my hands and not directly with people. (Faculty 4)

We can meet students developmentally where they are however centeredness is needed where they can recognize the need to start examining self deeply if they are going to effectively help others. (Faculty 6)

Sometime between October and November we find out that some students do not possess helping qualities that have been identified or healthy psycho social nurturing. (Faculty 1)

We have witnessed success when a student has chosen to exit from the program. It was a conscious decision. Awareness of self is a very difficult process in that one has to stand up and say you know what, this isn't for me and step back to rethink everything. That is success! (Faculty 4)

We have a lot of students that feel they have the right to help others, and they do not. It is a privilege, gift and skill to engage others in awareness, growth and problem solving. (Faculty 3)

Some are in it because they perceive the power, glory, prestige that might happen. No one can help as good as I can. I've worked with helpers who were more in it for power and that is extremely harmful. (Faculty 4)

The desire to help and the right to an education are not justifiable to ignore discussion on what motivates people to pursue human service education and careers. How we perceive ourselves is not always accurate with objective observations and outcomes of evaluation inventories which reveal cognitive and emotive patterns of what is actually understood. It is the whole person we are interested in and not the burden of ensuring that they will achieve gainful employment. There are many students' narratives that attest to the value of self awareness and reflective processes of unmasking defensive mechanisms and constructions of self that could result in harm to others and deepen the psycho social crisis that is unresolved.

In thinking about the comments made by many students who complete course work and have survived the first year marathon, a perceptual shift has occurred in that the dimension of adult education and making meaning processes have enabled them to conclude why they were pursuing human services. For some it came down to the realization that there was unresolved crisis in their life which created guilt of self and reconciliation. The thought that they could help others because of what they suffered was a theme of discussion and critical reflection for understanding. Their conclusion was that they were acting on habit rather than conscious awareness of desires and behaviours. Most importantly, they needed time now to reconsider how felt minus drives could harm rather than help those intended.

Self Advocacy

In order for most students to experience growth and academic success they must have multi level supports to help them adjust to post secondary education and skills development. Parents, guidance counsellors, sponsoring agencies, mentors and so on can play key influences on the student learning to self advocate. Students, who seek clarity of information, disclose any learning challenges they may have and immerse themselves in the learning culture tend to fare much better than students who remain aloof, disengaged or avoidant of the transition required of them. Self advocacy needs to be nurtured from childhood through the young and later adolescent years as part of the development of autonomy. The consciousness of psychosocial development is lost on many parents for various reasons and it has not been given equal value and emphasis with academics in educational institutions. Many parents advocate for their children but perhaps give up on encouraging and supporting their child to advocate for themselves.

A principle the elementary and high schools should adopt is the principle of self advocacy. It is unfortunate that many children fear their teachers rather than develop trust and regard for them. They may have a voice at home when it comes to their learning but are afraid to express their needs or concerns to the teacher. Whether this is the result of perceptual inhibitors or what is felt and meaning given needs to be determined. Students cannot come first nor can learning be transformative unless we have a greater vision beyond strategic plans and economic drivers. Some students may feel that they are self advocating by asking for clarification after the fact or chronically seeking extensions at the eleventh hour, however this is not the case. Self advocacy reflects behaviours reminiscent of achievement identity in that the student does not need a lot of guidance in terms of their learning. They are self regulating when it comes to their quality of learning and receptive to feedback in terms of not confusing life knowledge with disciplines of study. The student

is self directed also in that they demonstrate the management of time, the ability to organize tasks and file information effectively so that when it is needed they are able to easily locate it.

Multi level supports need to have previously existed and presently exist in the student's life.

This may indicate self advocacy skills that have been developed because the student has accessed these supports in the past. (Faculty 1)

Jump start helps to make it real for students in terms of expectations, demands and impact on families and relationships. (Faculty 6)

They may initially be hurt by the fact that family members do not share their enthusiasm or interest in the success and change they are experiencing. I'm somebody now and I'm feeling it and learning that I have worth and you are not going to take that from me again. (Faculty 4)

Opportunity to experience and give feedback, learning to advocate for yourself, learning to question status quo, that's a big step for them. (Faculty 2)

When the student arrives at NSCC what our expectations are at the end of first year is that you are the independent learner. We provide the appropriate scaffolding and provide resources and supports. You have to embrace the learning yourself, you have to find strategies to be successful. (Faculty 4)

Students who struggle over the first few months to settle into the program and begin the transition of owning their learning and success comment on the positive experience that first year human services has been for them. Of course all students must adapt and adjust to adult learning models and current trends and practices of creating their own learning experiences.

Owning the outcomes rather than passive dependence on faculty to create a positive experience for them is the reality. Some become disappointed when they have to engage in ongoing critical reflection and perspective development rather than just merely completing assignments as they did in the past. The lack of self advocacy reflects the variation in learners' social history and developmental trajectories. Effectively advocating for self is process learning and promotes autonomy and independence. In making meaning beyond language and ideas, advocacy is part of identity achievement and a strong predictor of student success.

Process of Change

Accepting dissonance through critical reflective processes to determine actualities make meaning of readings and engagement processes that aid in the development of insights into self, others and the social world. Knowledge acquisition becomes enhanced intuitiveness, perceptiveness, self actualization and perspective taking. The self imperative of "means to an end" education or mastery of technical skills may not contribute to the greater social imperative of transformation. Language whether implicit or explicit is only words, symbols and ideas void of meaning unless students experience engagement processes that focus on validity and testing of assumptions. In terms of human service education the readiness or willingness of students to engage in transformative learning assumed as an adult activity is the meaningfulness of their questioning, contributions and reflections.

The process of change is not normative in our culture. Increasingly we are being encouraged to talk about what we feel. What behaviours do I own, what do other people own? (Faculty

1)

We have witnessed change when a student has chosen to exit from the program. It became a conscious decision. It is a very difficult process in that one has to conclude that this isn't for me and step back to rethink everything. That is success! (Faculty 3)

This change transcends the post secondary or training environment and shows up in the work place. People can jump through all the hoops or manoeuvre through the mazes in order to achieve the base reward but it will be the workplace and private spheres that will reflect how permeating and transformative their engagement has been. (Faculty 4)

I think it is very healthy that their perceptions and expectations begin to change from September because it tells me that they are really looking under all the rocks and attending to what people are saying. (Faculty 2)

They begin to experience conflict because of opposing and refuting views. If or when they express meaningfulness they may conclude that they are unfulfilled in relating to others. (Faculty 4)

Certainly the process of change and transformative learning is not an easy transition for any person. There are many layers and cycles which need to be valued from resistance to necessitated disorientations. The rethinking of language and its use (e.g., the meaning of "success") needs to be regularly considered in our responses to difficulties felt or expressed by students. The human service and educational paradigms that continue to exist remain formula based and paternalistic in their nature. The behaviours reflective of change are too many to list. However, self awareness, dialectical engagement, conflict resolution, positive moratoria and self advocacy are all inherent processes of change that provide evidence that indeed self transformative and self determination has been experienced.

Center for Student Success and Academic Chairs Focus Group Thematic Analysis

The center for student success and academic chairs (CSS and AC) focus group consisted of 5 and 3 participants respectively. In reviewing the data from this focus group, it was felt that perhaps individuals may have thought that the researcher wanted definitive responses to the 10 guiding questions. Unfamiliarity with the theoretical frame work of the research may have contributed to the nature of responses shared and questions raised. The quality of the audio also made it difficult for the scribe to accurately document the full context of discussion even though notes were also taken during the session. This necessitated in following up with some participants who were barely audible or silent for the most part in order to gain clarification on responses lacking detail. From this process I was able to identify the most frequent and significant themes arising from feedback. These five themes provided meaning, thoughts and viewpoints on the ongoing challenges learners face and predictors of student success. Discussion also raised awareness of the challenges and unintended consequences of policy development. From this process the following themes were generated: Motivation for Enrolling in the Program; Student Expectations; Student Success; Sponsored Students; Admissions.

Motivation for Enrolling in Program

CSS and AC focus group participants were also asked what they believed were motivations for students enrolling in human services. Of the eight participants, consensus of response focused on life history and lived experiences as the key motive for enrolling. From their response, it appeared that CSS & AC participants viewed motivation as intricately connected to students' lived experiences.

Lived Experiences

First year human services can be seen as a foundation year particularly for students who have done little personal growth work and career or employment transitioning. Not all education is equal in terms of its developmental impact on individuals. Some students have expressed in the past that this is their last chance for personal redemption and to gain a true sense of their worth and ability to achieve. Sponsored students in particular feel the urgency to do well in the time frame allotted, creating immediate stress and anxiety for some. CSS and AC's focus group participants identified several non academic challenges many students face from external non support, identity struggles, deliberate sabotaging of learning by intimate relationships and cultural capital lag in terms of the cumulative effects of life experiences.

There is deliberate sabotaging of transformative learning mainly with intimate pair bonds.

(CCS 4)

One participant alluded to the disorientating dilemma created by self examination and critical assessment of one's values, beliefs and interpersonal qualities.

There is a questioning of behaviours and levels of engagement. They have to rely on their own inner drive; yet, there is a fear of going inside themselves. Doing something for themselves speaks to their self worth. (CSS3)

For many who are struggling with self worth and identity issues, this disorienting affect will derail them from their goal and tax positive coping strategies to manage daily readings, writing, reflecting, and critical consuming of information as well as relationship expectations. CSS and AC focus group participants identified life histories of unhealthy childhoods, chronic self worth issues, significant impact of others, self perception and resiliency as significant factors to explain why many students apply to human services.

Extensive life experiences and issues such as addictions or not having a very good childhood are the bases for many students decision to apply to human services.

(CSS1)

For many first year human service students, their helping identities may have been shaped during the critical years of child hood and adolescence. Diverse narratives reflect experiences of child parent role reversal, empathy for parental pain, critical incidents of trauma and loss resulting in prolonged grieving. In recalling shared narratives of lived experiences, one student shared with the class how she took on the role of nurturer to his/her father after her mother had suddenly abandoned the family leaving only a note to explain her sudden disappearance. Another student shared his/her pain of her father being charged with embezzlement of client funds causing the breakup of the family. From personality complexes of good child, victim, prodigy, prodigal, protector, and the students' self perception of experiences all have influenced their self worth and what they believe they are capable of.

Some students already arrive at the college with a defeatist mindset as a result of their personal and community history. (CSS6)

Despite diverse experiences internalized and external influences, some students are still very much embedded in their experience. Many possess empathetic qualities; however, their history of helping or responding may have been skewed by obligatory or necessitated actions within the family. Regardless of where each learner is developmentally, each will face his or her own challenges to see self within their course work and skill development in order to get to the heart of authentically valuing self and others.

For some traumatic life experiences cause them to want to help others. (CSS2)

Life narratives orientate some to this type of work. (AC1)

Many former ALP students are in human services because of prior life experiences. (AC2)

Motivation for students coming into human services would be different from other programs. (AC1)

Some students have arrived at a Hero mentality and the rawness of many students immobilizes them. (CSS5)

Overall responses concluded that students who are still embedded in their experiences may see the glass as half full and themselves advantaged because of what they have lived through.

I would have to say from my experience that the programs are not aligned with the perceptions and self assumptions of students. (AC1)

The significance of lived experiences cannot be substituted by role plays and simulations. If students' have not attempted in the past to make meaning of lived experiences or resist the critical reflective process, lived experiences may in actuality disadvantage them. In turn, what they expected to experience from human services will affect their judgments, ethical decision making, professional integrity and chances of success which includes being gainfully employed.

Student Expectations

How often have we expected to have a positive experience be it school, work, knowing others, anticipated social events only to be disappointed that the actual experience was far from what was expected or advertised. In some cases the experience does exceed our expectations. It is significant to understand the impact that expectations play in students' decision making.

Referencing Dan Ariel's research on the predictability of irrationality, I have become aware that decision making is not as logical or rational as implied. "If you tell people up front that something is

pleasant/easy, negative/challenging odds are good that they will end up agreeing with you ... not because their experience tells them so but because of their expectations” (Ariely, 2008, p.159). Even though calendars, web sites and other mediums of information are available for potential students if these are used by the student merely to inform rather than being part of a larger decision making process to ensure timing, good fit and readiness then, the mediums of informing will not be that helpful.

CSS and AC’s felt that many students did not do a thorough enough investigation and research of adult education and the learning culture of the community college. They spoke of students being surprised by the workload, speed of transmission and processing and academic challenges. In many cases, decisions and timing to study was made under duress of availability of funding. Adding to the stress were ultimatums of, “Go to school or find another place to live” coupled with distorted or romanticized perceptions of what the experience would be like.

. Psycho social struggles become evident through critical reflective processes:

Many students see the program as group therapy. (AC1)

Some apply to the program because they are under the impression that it will be stress free and easy:

Even though the school may know what human services is about many entering the program do not. (AC1)

For many it is a major scholastic challenge:

Interpretation of how intensive and extensive the education; very much like a Masters program in many ways. (CSS3)

Choice and action is embodied in decision making processes:

I don't believe I have met a learner yet who has invested meaningful research into what the program is about. (AC1)

The exploratory process to determine good fit is significant:

There was a lack of preparation for returning to school. (CSS2)

Misperceptions and attitudinal indifference about educational demands creates false expectations:

Not aware of workload expectations. (CCS5)

“Understanding irrationality is important to our every day actions and decisions. The assumption that we are all rational implies that, in everyday life we compute the value of all the options we face and then follow the best possible path of action” (Ariely, 2008, xix- xx).

CSS and AC's expressed that student expectations of the human service program, academic challenge, reflective processes, learning assessments, professional conduct and industry expectations are incongruent with actualities of the program. Students' struggles are principally about preparedness and conscious awareness as to just what they can expect.

Students' actual experiences will depend on how well they research the college culture and in particular their programs of choice. Developing a strategy for succeeding and contingency plans to cope with unforeseen developments reflects awareness and intent.

Student Success

According to CSS and AC focus group participants, factors that are strong determinants of student success are adaptability, self belief, self regulation of one's learning, core academic

competencies, accepted partnership between learner and faculty, genuine interest in the program and healthy external supports.

There is an accepted partnership between student and faculty. (AC1)

Predicting student success is very high not only because of the aforementioned factors identified but also due to our understanding of positive and negative self fulfilling prophesy. In some cases, there are the unconscious forces that determine program outcomes. Some students experiencing transference issues and anxiety as a result of critical reflection and shared narratives of struggle may displace these affects on to faculty or group members.

Student success is defined solely by program completion and employability. However, this is a rather narrow definition of student success from a developmental view. Students who consider unintended learning realize how essential the experience itself is and either exit more aware or continue more ready to engage in authentic learning and change. The community college has adopted a strength based approach and view of interpersonal relationships reflective of the economic logic of efficiency, productivity, cost and profitability. This creates a dominant paradigm of positivism that may over look or not consider social and developmental realities that no amount of positivism can reverse without effort and struggle.

Several focus group participants spoke of engagement in terms of the students' acceptance and responsibility to make meaning of language and the need to understand personal and professional ethics.

They have a clear knowledge of what lies ahead of them as well as an acceptance of change and adaptability. (CSS5)

Student success is conjoint with self regulation of learning. Such learners have a history of seeking out faculty and others because they actually want to understand their learning beyond passing an assignment. The CSS and AC's view on student success was very broad and encompassing of students well being which I have framed within the context of psycho social development. Meeting students where they actually are reflects the college acknowledging individual learners' developmental history and our multiple tasks to ensure growth promoting experiences. It also speaks to value added learning beyond defined and measured outcomes. Despite social and environmental ecological interdependency, CSS and AC focus group explicitly identified the need for students to be well informed and prior preparation as part of a necessary process to ready one for success. Much research validates and affirms what is known and suspected when investigating the determinants of student success.

What comes to mind is a belief in themselves and strong external supports. (CSS3)

For some first year students, post secondary is an extension of grade 13. (AC1)

It is always important to connect with the student. A supportive home environment, time, overall wellness and a willingness to participate are vital. (CSS2)

A clear understanding of what lies ahead of them and prior consideration of the need for change. (CSS5)

Focus group participants were clear on the dichotomy of success and difficulty. Despite progressive principles of practice and core values related to student success, insuring equitable opportunity alone will not eradicate the disadvantaging affects of identity crisis, toxic ecologies and financial stress that many students have to manage if they expect to be successful.

Systemic practices disadvantage a people and the dysfunction remains despite principles of self determination. (CSS6)

“Matter of fact” and “that’s just the way the system works” attitudes will do little to eradicate the disadvantaging position that many of our students are starting from. Quality of life and social progress rests upon adult education becoming individual capacity development requiring real time, real funding, equitable opportunity, quality scaffolding and authentic supports.

Sponsored Students

Some sponsored students experience compounded struggles when it comes to life and occupational transitioning. They are taxed by time constraints in terms of the narrow window by which they need to complete courses and programs being offered. With a diversity of funding needs and employment maintenance issues some sponsored students’ can have greater stress management challenges that may not be realized or appreciated by funding bodies or the college. There is an obvious expectation of sponsored students to insure that program selection will significantly improve employment chances upon graduating.

When funded, there are additional pressures. (CSS6)

In building relationships of trust and modeling authentic regard you witness growth, increased confidence and change within some students who know they have to make good on their opportunities.

For many of our students college is a whole new world. They are the first generation of their family to attend post secondary. (CSS2)

Despite the unfolding of potential, sponsored students are very much aware of the limited time afforded them to obtain the credentials and skills required for reemployment. This creates

anxiousness and worry as to whether they will find gainful employment upon completion of the two year diploma. These instrumental stressors are compounded by the disorienting dilemma of emancipatory learning (Mezirow, 1991). A disorienting dilemma whether a traumatic event or culture shock may not immediately initiate self empowerment processes; however, such a dilemma raises questions of why and a rethinking of beliefs and perspectives held in one's frame of references. Disorienting dilemmas can catalyze authentic change and growth or result in retreating to a safe place. Several of the questions generated discussion on sponsored students in terms of difficulties with workload, adjusting to androgogical approaches to education, frustration over trying to balance school and private expectations and feeling over whelmed and anxious. Personnel with the center for student success deal with a range of issues affecting students from tuition, mental health, exiting, transferring to different programs, reducing course load, frustration with faculty to not having external support within their family or community. Academic chairs felt that in terms of the students' readiness to engage, these concerns were universal across all schools.

The biggest challenge is students coming to us with little or no confidence.

Intermingled with learning challenges are the positive and negative effects of lived experiences. (AC1/AC2)

Human Services is the philosophy of Empowerment. The school of business is able to easily categorize and move on. The school of access seems to invest in the human being. (AC1)

Regardless the encouragement of non academic growth of students through service learning, interpersonal awareness and critical examination of values and beliefs, social and self disorientation can result. A disorientating dilemma begins the process of authentic self empowerment. Any major challenge to an established perspective can result in conative dissonance. "These challenges are painful; they often call into question deeply held personal values and threaten

our very sense of self” (Mezirow 1991, p. 168). This reality is felt by all first year human service students; however, many resist the experience. For sponsored students, the educational window of opportunity to realize enhanced quality of life often is derailed by the realities CSS and AC’s identified pertaining to readiness, satisfying program outcomes and difficulties. Many sponsored students feel pressure of succeeding now because those are the established rules.

Only year I could get funding so I had to do it. (CSS2)

If a student exits without completing a program they are placed on probation for two years before refunding is considered. (CSS6)

They feel the lack of options as to course load and the time they have to achieve credits that requires more than an hour of homework each night. The process of authentic learning is time consuming and this is not sufficient time for those experiencing developmental challenges and defeatist mind set at the outset.

The process needs to slow down so that students can step back and explore. (CSS3)

There is a gap in communications between bureaucratic and community networks. (CSS3)

Do I have too much baggage to enter this program? (AC1)

School of access is more developmental than core programming. (AC2)

Human Services demands more of a development of soft skills. (CSS1)

Sponsored students feel lack of options as to course load. (CSS3)

Many lack healthy support systems, negative self worth and lack of understanding of the nature of this type of education. (CSS5)

CSS and AC focus group participants shared experiences of their direct involvement with sponsored students and the unique challenges the student faces compared to the general population. Discussion helped to identify and understand clearly the disadvantaged position many are at despite having access to occupational education.

Systemic practices disadvantage people and individuals and dysfunctions remain despite the language of self determination. (CSS6)

An unintended consequence of subsidized education is that it can create a sense of entitlement. It may reinforce general attitudes among educational consumers and the general population that community college education is cheap, quick and easy. Focus group participants more intimate with sponsored students and their issues shared significant facts and concerns that broaden the complexities of student readiness.

It appears from reflecting on shared experiences regarding predictors of student success that humanistic values and political /economic expediency of access, continuous intake, education without boundaries and minimal admission requirements do little to help the student ready themselves for transition and change that will be expected of them.

Admissions

The general admission requirements for acceptance to certificate or diploma programs of study at the Nova Scotia Community College are high school completion or equivalent. Individual programs may have additional admission criteria. The College also recognizes the general education diploma. Mature applicants must be at least 21 and provide supporting documents. Advanced standing will be considered for students who have previous post secondary education and relevant life and work histories. All instruction is conducted in English and the college continues the practice of saving seats for historically disadvantaged groups, (NSCC, 2009).

CSS and AC focus group participants for the most part were clear with their views on the admissions process that determines students' qualifications for programs of study within the Nova Scotia Community College system. They felt the colleges' core values were the overriding principles that determined admission. They stated that the community college was the only access college in the province and that its mandate more than any other post secondary institution in the province was to provide occupational education first for the critical mass of Nova Scotia's lacking essential skills that new economies demand. Although there are some screening processes reflective of liability and industry concerns, access and increasing enrolment are the imperatives that determine what qualified means. The application is a student data inventory tool.

It can be utilized as a proactive measure to making meaning of the data students provide. Without discriminating or using the data to deny access, this process would help in knowing where students actually are. Focus group participants felt that there was disconnection between admissions and what staff encountered in their day to day work with students.

I find the admissions process very removed from the work that we do. (CSS3)

Admissions still insistent on standard admissions processes. They do not own the struggle of student success. (AC1)

Participants recognized that it was to certain programs and industry credit that there were additional admission requirements that students must satisfy and not due to the standardized screening applied by admissions.

Our school has grown in leaps and bounds regarding police checks, immunizations, child abuse registry checks and more. (AC1)

It was felt that minimal admissions criteria student must satisfy when it came to work placements could place struggling students at a disadvantage since placements depend on faculty and community partners' evaluation and determination of suitability and whether there are any issues that would disqualify a student from placement.

Career counsellors are available at each campus to assist potential students with career exploration; however, if the process labels or boxes the student into categories without sufficient self awareness then a distorted sense of self and perceived strengths may be influencing decisions and program choice.

Admissions process should possibly include students' awareness of the program. If choices on applications vary dramatically it should be intercepted. (CSS5)

When I meet with students I wonder how their application was accepted or why they are in certain programs. (AC1)

The business of education and employment may compromise developmental realities. The language of business permeates education rhetoric, particularly at the post secondary level. Education models that stress total quality management and efficiency of services and products while well understood may overshadow the developmental needs of students when they are seen as merely educational consumers:

It has to do with numbers and access to programs and expectations of stakeholders. (CSS5)

Relevant and appropriate screening should be examined within the context the preparatory process:

There is an attempt to eliminate screening from most programs. That is the goal! (CSS2)

Deans in reality must take ownership for the challenges and struggles students and faculty face. (AC1)

These viewpoints reflect unintended consequences of open access and political and economic accountability that all educational institutions currently face. Government has always advocated for educating and re-skilling the labour force. Among post secondary institutions, community colleges are the most scrutinized when it comes to providing access to a mosaic of students and ensuring each succeeds despite limited developmental resources.

Center for student success and academic chair participants shared their views and concerns regarding the admissions process. It was alluded to that the admissions process should be more program specific reflecting the nature of learning and professional demands. Although there were valid points made, there were no concrete suggestions concerning on how the admissions processes could be improved. Nor was there any discussion forth coming regarding the program application as an instrument for gathering more specific data that could measure both academic and psycho-social readiness of health and human service students.

CHAPTER V

Summary and Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the first year experiences of human services diploma students across the community college through focus group inquiry. Explored were students' motivations and their psychosocial and academic readiness for enrolling in the Health and Human Services program. Also explored were expectations of post secondary education, adult learning principles and approaches to transformative learning. The three focus groups consisted of human services students, human services faculty, support services personnel and academic chairs from the school of access, health and human services and business on the Truro campus of the Nova Scotia Community College. Seven student focus group questions and ten faculty and support services/academic chair questions served as guiding questions for the three focus groups. The guiding questions generated focused discussion revealing similar and distinct viewpoints and perspectives on factors contributing to student readiness and success.

Many students who choose human services as a program of study are experiencing unresolved psychosocial challenges that impact directly on their ability to transition successfully to post secondary education. In particular, this study has focused on identifying and exploring possible student motivations for choosing human services education and transitional challenges to adult education.

The literature review of social, political and economic aspects of education historically as well as contemporary past/present research on psychosocial maturity and resourcefulness aided the research in conceptualizing and framing a perspective of psychosocial and academic readiness. In addition, review of dissertations of community college research and practice enabled me to link past research on psychosocial development with current research (2000 -2009) on a multitude of concerns and issues

from student access, ethnicity, social integration, developmental education, faculty assessments, institutional accountability, retention, attrition to goal attainment.

My intent was to investigate questions of why some students are able to authentically engage in the opportunities of occupational education while other students resort to strategies of survival and seeking out supports that inadvertently reinforce debilitating dispositions. Through moderating distinct focus group cohorts, we hoped to determine the relevance and significance of psychosocial readiness to student success.

Shared Themes: Motivation

Some themes were shared across all three focus groups whereas others were unique to specific groups. Motivation for applying to the program was addressed by all three groups.

Student Perspectives

For the student focus group, sharing the reasons they chose the human services program revealed a combination of salient intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Some intrinsic factors (intra-psychic factors/within the persons' control) reflected the thought process of individuals looking inward in order to put employability challenges or personal troubles they were facing in perspective. Many felt that their decision to return to school was about making change in terms of their personal wellbeing and future welfare.

In terms of extrinsic motivation (factors external to the individual), lifestyle choices such as family considerations, convenience of location, availability of funding took precedence for some. Students who were also parents needed to balance work with family life (extrinsic motivations) with the desire to develop a sense of identity or personal development (intrinsic motivation).

Faculty Perspectives

Faculty focus group participants addressed students' motivation for enrolling in the human service program in the context of instrumental learning. This refers to the "means to an end" approach of education when students engage in a technical and mechanical manner to achieve the stated outcomes of each course within the set program. Program selection is often determined by geographic location more so than whether it is the right time or good fit for the individual.

Faculty also addressed helping motivation that is common among human services students. Personal struggles and how sociable one is received by self and others are usually reflected in the reasons for wanting to help. The role of comforting or caring during childhood and adolescence reinforced and expected by recipients, can result in individuals internalizing helping as natural rather than exhibiting compensating behaviours.

CSS & AC's Perspectives

CSS & AC focus group participants' most frequent theme to explain student motivation for applying to human service programs was reflected in a variation of life experiences both positive and negative. Debilitative motivations and needs for pursuing the human services diploma programs reflects individual psychology and specifically the work of Adler (1935) on *felt minus* whereby the individual functions in manner compensating loss or other self struggle. The students' epistemological beliefs and internalized sense of self may trigger anxiety when exposed to challenges of adult education.

Shared Theme: Learning Demands of First Year

Learning demands and the dimensions of adult education themes was shared by faculty and student focus groups. Transformative dimensions of adult education include making meaning of words and language by naming our realities, reflecting for meaning and insight, producing artefacts as evidence of learning, recognizing that problems do exist and willingness to engage in critical inquiry. Faculty recognized that engagement was one of the most important approaches to intentional learning students

needed to embrace. The task of education of sorting information from knowing which fosters heightened awareness and self determination.

Student Perspectives

Analysis of student focus group revealed three themes in the realm of learning: distinctiveness of the first year, different approaches to learning and three modes of learning.

Distinctiveness of first year human services begins at the student/faculty level of considering egalitarian relationships. This model of interaction may be foreign to many students due to prior socialization and dominant cultural modes that naturalize “power over” relationships. Students determine the objectives or purpose of their learning and are expected to articulate how they will learn, provide evidence of learning and faculty or supervisor provides feedback on the validity of their learning. Journal writing and critical reflection are processes used to allow students to make connections between new information and life experiences. Faculty must model ethics and regard for each learner which is crucial in order for transformative learning to be experienced.

Three modes of learning reflected in the student focus group discussions were: instrumental, communicative and transformative. *Instrumental learning* is grounded in our relationship to the environment, other people and status achievement. *Communicative learning* is the interactive process of finding meaning in written and non verbal language, content and the interpersonal quality of our communications with others. *Transformative learning* is reinterpreting and old or current experience from a new set of expectations or discovered awareness, thus giving a new meaning and perspective to one’s history. In order for learning to change lives, approaches and measures of learning must support transformation. Does learning merely satisfy instrumental outcomes or are students encouraged to question and rethink what they are learning in the spirit of creativity, innovation and self-empowerment?

Global competition demands a more rigorous technological and academic challenge for community college students. Occupational education and skill development within the NSCC follows a collegial model. Core program across schools within the community college do not afford developmental education for many reasons and do not reflect general education. It appears that not only are first year students confused or surprised by the academic and psychosocial rigors but it appears that external agencies and institutions are not quite sure what quality of education occurs within the Nova Scotia Community College.

Faculty Perspectives

Faculty discussed learning in the context of androgogical approaches to education and predominant learning challenges. Among androgogical principles explored were engagement, self-awareness, making meaning and collaborative learning.

For many students, fear, doubt, mistrust present immediate inhibitors to the quality of engagement and learning they experience. Discourses of study and shared experiences have no relevance to some students because it threatens their conditioned self. There is a clear distinction between authentic inquiry and hijacking the learning process.

Self awareness is a key dimension of transformative learning and can move the individual away from a passive or deliberative place of indifference to rethinking negative cognitive dissonance. It invites students to consider blind spots that distort perceptions of self and others.

Self-awareness processes require critical reflection and emotive connectedness with self-identity. Making meaning is diving for understanding in order to generate insights and develop perspectives on issues. It is about reconsidering absolutes and reconsidering how we know what we know. It invites critical dialogue on supposed facts and fosters greater consideration of individual levels of consciousness rather than basing what we know on socialized assumptions.

Students' were more likely to be self directed in their learning if they were grounded in an accurate sense of self. Readiness involved the students' desire to engage in effortful thinking. Making meaning requires the student to make connection with content and conative approaches that facilitate academic and social-emotive development. Applied learning identifies objectives, outcomes and approaches associated with concepts, content and practice.

Not only did faculty participants discuss key androgogical principles as these applied to student learning but they also addressed predominant learning challenges that students faced in their first year of the program. Perennial academic challenges are no less a concern than psychosocial development. Validity of learning concerns identifying clearly stated and measurable objectives and at what level the student will produce evidence of learning. Faculty spoke of the gap between high school education and approaches to adult education and self determination philosophies. In terms of learning styles/preferences, proposition writing, critical review of literature, critical reflection and practicum require learning at the application, analysis, synthesis and evaluative levels. This presupposes that students must arrive at the college with an academic foundation. Reflection involves a critique of what is actually known. Reflective analysis requires the student to engage in abstract mental processes.

Student Perceptions, Expectations and Success

Unlike the student and faculty focus groups, the CSS and AC's focus group did not address learning directly. This group was not involved in a teaching/learning relationship with students. Instead, they focused on student perceptions, expectations and success. Actual experiences alluded to the phenomenon of expectancy theory and how it can distort effective decision making.

CSS and AC Perspectives

CSS and AC focus group participants discussed concerns over student expectations of the college, program and faculty. Participants emphasized the effect expectations played in students'

choices and decision making. Student perceptions of human service programs, faculty competence and the college in general are more the result of hearsay and negative views rather than self investigation. Participants presupposed that many students cannot appreciate the extent of engagement required without direct sampling of program delivery, observing and discussing with faculty what actually is experienced. There was general agreement that student success was broader (encompassing of student well being) than goal attainment and that student persistence was conjoint with self regulation of learning.

Value Added

Student focus group theme of “value added learning” affirmed evidence of transformative levels of education. This theme was unique to the student focus group and reflected their regard for the program and its positive impact on their lives.

Student Perspectives

Some focus group participants felt that the learning experience went well beyond successful completion of course work. It was about arresting cumulative burdens and awakening to the possibilities of self determination. It was about developing multiple vantage points by which one could view interpersonal drama. Learning promoted reconciliation and eventual acknowledgement of how the individual impacts others. Making meaning helped to chip away the plaque and rigidity of mind. Transferable and broadness of learning has rippling effects across the lifespan. Learning-centered meant currency with actualities and life scripts of students. While the study of attachment theory and evidence based learning helped students consider the paradox of family dynamics.

Program Outcomes

The faculty focus group discussed program outcomes extensively. They addressed students’ perceptions of helping, self advocacy and the process of change. Those who are successful and

complete the program typically experience a transformation in their ways of knowing and are able to reflect critically on their beliefs and assumptions.

Faculty Perspectives

It is unethical to ignore discussion on what motivates people to pursue human service education and careers. Many of our students have experienced role and identity reversal in childhood and adolescence by having been responsive to the needs of parents, siblings or others and these experiences have greatly shaped their helping identities. Their quality of responsiveness and care may reflect strengths and the art of caring; however, without examining the impact helping histories and belief systems, the student should not assume they understand empowerment work. Hindsight has left many students to conclude that they were acting on compensatory need rather than conscious awareness of felt minuses.

Not only is awareness of one's motivations for helping an important outcome of the program but faculty also felt that students who demonstrated self advocacy closest reflected achievement identity. They do not need a lot of guidance in their learning, manage time well and have effective methods of organizing and retrieving information when needed. Self advocacy is a manifestation of identity achievement and strong predictor of goal attainment.

Sponsored Students

CSS and AC's theme of "sponsored students" considered additional challenges that distinct student cohorts face despite open access to post secondary education. This theme was unique to this focus group.

CSS and AC's Perspectives

Individual focus group participants felt that sponsored students experience double jeopardy in that many are taxed by time constraints in terms of the narrow window afforded them to complete

course and program offerings. There is the obvious expectation that program selection will insure significantly improved employment chances upon graduating. Traditional college students do not face these specific stressors. For sponsored students, the educational window of opportunity to embrace transformative learning is often derailed by identity struggles and social isolation both institutionally as well within geo political ethnic groups. They feel pressure to succeed now because those are the established rules.

Admissions

CSS and AC's theme of "admission " spoke of the significant role admissions plays in student success open access and the business of education impacting student experiences, support services and industry needs.

CSS and AC's Perspectives

Focus group participants felt that colleges' core values were the overriding principles that determine admission. Although there are some program specific screening processes reflective of liability and industry concerns, open access and increasing enrolment are the imperatives that determine college and program demographics. Participants felt there is a detachment between admissions and what staff encountered in their day to day work with students. It was felt that additional admissions criteria was the result of program and industry consultation and not the result of admissions initiated policy. Inadvertently, minimal admission requirements could leave some students at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to equitable placements since placement suitability of a student results from placement/faculty discussions on operational concerns. It was alluded to that the admissions process should be more program specific reflecting distinction between esoteric pursuit of knowledge and skills versus education.

Psychosocial Development

Shared experiences of student focus group participants generated personal disclosures that paralleled psychosocial development challenges. The use of analogies, metaphors, shared narratives and making associations with course content enabled students to understand theories, behaviours and perspectives and to identify themselves in psychological and sociological encounters.

Student Perspectives

When sharing their reasons/motivations for joining the program, student participants frequently referred to a series of crises that precipitated major life transitions. From job burnout, pregnancy (concern for others), displacement from work, workplace alienation to naïve trust in the purpose of education, these life events or crisis catalyzed self reflection, decision making and personal resolve on the part of most participants to make change in their lives. James Marcia's work (1966, 1980, 2001) attempted to discover empirical evidence of identity conflict that impacts an individual's capacity to consider options or actual choice as conative dynamics of the decision making process. Marcia's four identity statuses are Identity Achievement, Moratorium, Foreclosure and Identity Diffusion. *Moratorium* is an identity status that involves exploration but no commitment (Arnett, 2007). Students exhibiting *Foreclosure* may be strongly committed to their position but their acting upon decisions may not have been arrived at via self investigation and exploration. Those in a state of *Diffusion* share in common a lack of commitment and meaningful exploration. They are whatever seems advantageous to be in the moment. *Identity Achievement* reflects accepted struggle and authentic growth work. The student has been through a crisis or decision making struggle and are self acting on ideological and occupational goals. They are acting on what they have concluded and are pretty much on track, needing only appropriate guidance. For many of the student focus group participants they were conscious of the struggles they had been through.

Discussion

In this discussion of the research findings, an attempt will be made to relate highlights from this inquiry to ideas generated in the literature.

The first shared theme in this study addressed student motivations for enrolling in human services. This theme reflected some of the same reasons shared by Miller, Pope, and Steinmann (2005) for students attending community college. Among the reasons these authors shared were proximity to home, cost, availability of programs, and access to upgrading or developmental education.

Similar to the faculty focus groups' ideas of student helping motivations, and the CSS and AC's relating student beliefs to positive and negative life experiences, Corey and Corey (1998) addressed motivations for becoming a helper. That is, lived experiences whether positive or challenging can advantage or disadvantage the student.

The student and faculty shared theme about learning demands of first year addressed the distinctiveness of the first year along with different approaches and modes of learning. Also explored was the learning paradigm shift from pedagogical to androgogical approaches of intentional learning and major learning challenges. This theme reflected the work of Mezirow (1991) on transformative dimensions of adult learning. Approved ways of seeing and understanding, shaped by our language, culture and personal experiences, collaborate to set limits to our future learning. (p.1) Thus, it becomes crucial that the individual learn to negotiate meanings, purposes, and values critically, reflectively, and rationally instead of passively accepting the social realities defined by others. (p.3)

CSS and AC's participants theme on student expectations of the college, programs and faculty was significant to our consideration on how logical and rationale choice and decision making actual is. According to Ariely (2008), expectation can influence nearly every aspect of life. "If you tell people up front that something is pleasant/easy, negative/challenging odds are good that they will end up

agreeing with you...not because their experience tells them so but because of their expectations” (p. 159). If students do not receive accurate information on the college, its programs and faculty competencies, then this factor could greatly influence preparedness and have adverse consequences on actual experiences.

Student focus group theme of “value added learning” reflected many of the theories, perspectives and research on transformative dimensions of education. “A disorienting dilemma begins the process of transformation. Any major challenge to an established perspective can result in a transformation” (Mezirow, 1991 p. 168). Students were able to articulate specific transformations that occurred and personalized what they had learned which is the essence of personal growth and awareness. “Consciousness rising starts with an articulated acknowledgement of power and ends in a systematic understanding of the nature and complexity of the entire power-bound social reality” (p.186).

The faculty theme on perennial academic challenges noted the impact that academic readiness can have on the students’ ability to engage confidently in dialectical processes. The cognitive (analysis, synthesis, evaluation) and emotive (critical reflection, making meaning) demands inhibits engagement of students who have not been cultivated in these academic levels of learning. The extensive developmental needs of students suggest that there is a substantial portion of students functioning below college level in core academic areas (Marti, 2009, p.17).

CSS and AC’s focus group theme on student success linked success to readiness and included a broader definition than merely successful completion of course outcomes. This view is consistent with the qualitative model of student success by Wirth and Padilla (2008). At the community college level, student success often takes on a broader meaning as an encompassing realization of good fit and the need for strategic planning to achieve.

CSS and AC's theme of "sponsored students" shared a perspective of how underrepresented populations far too often experience double jeopardy in terms of set time frames by which education and skill development is to occur. External funding is often times contingent upon rigid time frames of completion. Interviews with career counsellors on sponsored students had shed light on distinct challenges these students face. Historically community colleges have provided vocational training for disadvantaged populations and open access along with relatively low cost. However access does not mean equitable education if distinct external barriers are not addressed.

Another emerging theme identified and discussed by CSS and AC's focus group participants concerned admission processes. Relevant points were made and concerns raised reflected general subject matters covered by Armstrong (2000) on the relationship between student success and admission criteria. Armstrong's study found that student dispositional information (cognitive, behavioural, affective traits) and demographic variables had more explanatory power of student persistence and goal attainment.

Student focus group participants shared experiences about their dispositional challenges, reflective of identity and achievement struggles and resolve. This is consistent with finding meaning in Erikson's (1950, 1959, 1963, 1968) psycho- social identity theory and Marcia's (1966, 1980, 2001) identity statuses. Self awareness processes facilitated over the course of engagement and documentation of actual learning enabled participants to make the connection with identity theory and personal troubles. Identity status reflected individual motives for applying to human service education as awareness processes reconstructed the interplay between individual histories, dispositional states, conative development and decision making. Participants were able to associate Marcia's identity statues with their lived experiences.

Conclusion

Overall the method of data gathering in researching psychosocial and academic readiness of students pursuing a human service designate provided a richness of thoughts, shared experiences and perspectives reflective of general experiences and individual perspectives of the three focus groups. The research was collaborative in that participants' level of interest and engagement was invaluable to the breadth and depth of data gathering and analysis. Underlying this research has been the ongoing questions of why some students adapt successfully to occupational education while a percentage of students experience academic and personal difficulties that result in many disengaging from the program and in other cases, the college.

The purpose of this research on student psychosocial and academic readiness was not to discover the characteristics of persistent students and less persistent students but rather to discover whether a parallel existed between theory and actual lived experiences of students. All three focus group cohorts offered meaningful insights and views on the subject of student readiness and diverse personal reasons and social factors for institution and program selection. In general the research revealed different states of psychosocial and academic readiness of first year human service students and has contributed to an increased understanding of the complexities and necessity of student preparation. Psychosocial dynamics change depending on time, place and circumstance however the two constants (dichotomies) result in negative and positive tensions that alerts the individual of the need to make life adjustments in order to manage psychosocial equilibrium. If identifying and meeting students' psychosocial needs as they enter the college is understood, then it is reason that we must acknowledge the two constants of accumulative advantages and accumulative disadvantages. These influence choice, qualities of learning and student self realization that they are capable of achieving authentic growth and academic success.

Limitations

As stated earlier, efforts were made to invite broad participation of two year students who had completed first year human services at other sites within the Nova Scotia Community College system. This was to ensure that a large sample could be drawn from in hopes that there would be a cross section of student experiences distinct from the experiences of first year students at Truro. However the low response rate did not provide us with a large sample to determine whether issues of psychosocial and academic readiness reflect types of student who exist today or influenced by faculty approaches and nature of engagement with students. Student focus group participants were all successful at varying levels during first year. The study might have better enhanced our understanding of the connection between psychosocial/academic readiness and goal attainment if students who exited the program or transferred to other programs or sections participated in the study.

It was conjectured that the low response rate may have been the result of students not being able to appreciate the theoretical focus of the research or its significance in general. Perhaps there was no perceived value of participation and the positive influence it may have on meeting new people with diverse learning and educational experiences. Also it was believed that no value would be given to the research if there was no mark or strong enough incentive attached to it. Lastly as a method of inquiry focus group research has its limitations in that generalized inferences cannot be made to a broader population.

Having an outside moderator had advantages and disadvantages. The neutrality of this moderator in relation to the research topic enabled me to distance myself from the data gathering and therefore, not unduly influence how participants engaged or responded to questions. Unfamiliarity with the subject matter made it more difficult for the moderator to probe or follow up on certain ideas. Also, the moderator was operating from different assumptions about what counted as knowledge. Had I personally moderated the groups, the data would have been more narrative in nature rather than

“question and answer”. This situation, however, did not prevent me from drawing on my own knowledge of context and interpreting as well as analyzing the data.

Recommendations and Suggestions

The following recommendations and suggestions are a formation of ideas, perspectives and insights based on findings of this inquiry and generated from community college research literature reviews and broad literature reviews. Recommendations and suggestions are presented for the Nova Scotia Community College’s consideration.

Recommendations for Research

In their resolve for institutional accountability the Nova Scotia Community College ought to include research of external agencies and government department’s perspectives and policies impacting occupational education equity. The Nova Scotia Community College should attempt to discover how their own policies and perspectives align with or differ from these agencies and departments.

The Community College should initiate a college wide fact finding survey on mental illness and mental health service needs of students as part of the ongoing struggle to raise awareness of the pervasiveness of mental illness and its impact on student success. In doing so this would aid in the larger societal campaign to eradicate the stigmatization and denial of mental illness.

Institutional Research could invite collaboration from faculty in participatory research to conduct a follow up study of all campus offering first year human services education.

Recommendations for Program Development and Practice

The Nova Scotia Community College should audit college prep functions, career counselling services and career connections programs across the college to determine preparedness effectiveness and the alignment of traditional academic upgrading and holistic developmental education.

A rethinking of student success would acknowledge individual dispositions and recognize diversity of time frames needed by non traditional students as well as non dominant cultures. This would be significant to funding formulas for low income students who desire to pursue post secondary occupational education.

The academic calendar needs to be explicitly clear on the nature of first year human services education and essential foundation skills. As well, the college calendar needs to be explicit on dimensions and approaches of learning associated with applied education.

Human Services Education needs a greater profile in the College's recruitment/image strategies in order to shift a cultural mindset of devaluing human service education and work to recognizing its critical role in fostering quality of life indexes. In keeping with college prep and approaches to aid and support prospective students deciding which program is the best fit for them, the college could produce a video of human service graduates who embraced adult learning and transformative approaches to education. This video might enhance reflective choice of college, campus and program selection. The alumni association of the Nova Scotia Community College could collaborate with human service alumni to publish narratives from the field that focus on what transformation has meant beyond rhetoric to personal lives. This publication could serve as another source of informed decision making.

Developmental education should focus on four key illiteracies that determine quality of education and self efficacy: 1) Numeracy; 2) Library Literacy; 3) Perspective Taking; 4) Interpersonal Communication.

Human services Education should have a developmental education component that can identify where students actually are in developing a model of self determination and micro/macro goal attainment.

In enhancing the developmental value of cooperative/collaborative learning, students need to be provided with measureable inventories to assess a range of cognitive, psycho motor and interpersonal skills that will better promote students valuing cooperative learning.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Questions for Students

Why did you initially choose Human Services as your program of study?

How would you describe your experiences with first year studies in terms of demands, challenges and expectations compared to previous educational experiences?

Did the learning and experience provide added value to your life beyond course credits?

Was there anything missing from your previous education (academic or otherwise) that would have eased the transition and adaptation to first year studies?

How were you challenged by the assumptions of adult learning principles and approaches?

How were you able to benefit and take advantage of adult learning approaches?

To what extent did your experiences in the Human Services program align with and differ from your initial expectations?

Did the course offerings and approaches in the Human Services program make sense to you in light of industry demands?

What did you find easiest and most difficult in your studies?

What supports were in place to help you meet the challenges that you encountered?

Can you think of any supports that were not available that might have helped you to meet the challenges of the program?

Before entering the program were you aware of the student (achievement) success rate in first year studies?

Based on your individual experiences and shared narratives of your colleagues, what do you think student success means and how would you explain the achievements and difficulties of first year students?

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions for Faculty and CSS and AC

What do you believe are motivations for enrolling in a Human Services program?

How psychosocial/interpersonal ready do you believe students are to pursue human service education and training?

How academic ready do you believe students are to pursue a program in Human Services concentrations?

How does the psychosocial/interpersonal and academic readiness of Human Service students compare with that demanded by the schools of Access, Business, Applied Arts and New Media?

How ready are students to: a) pursue adult education? b) take advantage of adult learning principles and approaches?

a) To what extent do you believe that programs align or differ from student's initial expectations and perceptions? b) Do you believe that students perceive their course offerings as relevant in connection to industry demands?

What do you believe that students find easiest and most difficult in adjusting to the challenges and demands of Human Service education and training? b) What supports are available to help students meet these challenges? c) What supports are unavailable that might help students meet these challenges?

How effective are the admissions processes and the practices of screening, training and insuring equitable work experiences?

What do you attribute to student success and difficulties among first year human service students? How might these factors reflect individual readiness?

What social cultural changes have occurred over the past half century that has redefined the adult learner? To what extent might social cultural and economic changes impact the general readiness and employability of learners pursuing occupational education?

Appendix C

Dear Participants:

My name is Daniel Criss and I am a graduate student in the Masters of Arts Educational Psychology program at Mount Saint Vincent University. I would like you to participate in a research study of human services students and their perceptions of and experiences with human services education and training. This study is investigating psychosocial development and scholastic readiness of learners in the human services program at the Truro campus. The study requires group participation and collaboration across several subgroups. The information gathered from group discussions will be used to understand and identify themes, trends, similarities and perspectives of individual's experiences. The project will be under the supervision of Dr. Anne MacCleave.

Fonda Smyth will be moderating focus groups of second year human service students, human service faculty and the centre for student success/academic chairs. A series of focus group research questions have been designed for students as well as a separate series of research questions for faculty and center for student success/academic chairs. The focus groups will take place during the 2007 fall semester at the Truro campus. Each focus group will consist of between 4 to 8 members. Those who express interest will be invited to participate in a confidential group. If more people than required volunteer for the focus groups, a random process will be used to select the required number of group participants. Before beginning the focus group, I will describe the study and participants will have an opportunity to ask questions about the project.

The consent form will be distributed for your perusal and you will be asked to sign the consent form before beginning the research. Those who participate in the study may refuse to answer any question during group discussions and they may withdraw from the study at any time. A qualitative approach will ensure that the research is descriptive and relevant to the needs and interests of learners and other stakeholders who have common concerns with retention, student success and employability of human services graduates. I will make use of audio – taped focus group sessions in order to fully attend to what is being shared with permission from participants. Results of the research will be available for you to review during the research and after the data analysis has been complete.

While the study is minimal risk to participants, there is a chance that some of the questions or subsequent questions and varying responses may upset some individuals therefore as moderator I will be both observer and participant in order to attend to both verbal and non verbal communications as well as perception checking with group participants. I will also inform participants how they can contact me when the group is finished if they have further questions or concerns.

All information collected during the study will be confidential, and narratives of background information cannot be used to identify individual participants. The groups' discussion will be audio taped for transcribing and analysis and will be erased once this process is complete. Written transcriptions of the tapes will be shredded. All information gathered will be stored in an access-controlled computer file or stored filing cabinet and used only by the researcher and his supervisor and will be kept confidential. Consent forms will be stored separately from audio tapes and transcripts in a locked filing cabinet and shredded immediately after completion of the study. A summary of the results will be distributed to management, participants and any interested non participants at the Truro campus of the Nova Scotia Community College.

If you are interested in participating in this study please sign the attached consent form and then return it to Mount Saint Vincent. In you have any questions before you make your decision, please contact me (daniel.criss@nscc.ca) or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Anne MacCleave, (902 – 457-6182; anne.maccleave@msvu.ca). Additionally, if you have questions about how this study is being conducted, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, who is not directly involved in the study at 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca. Finally, if you would like to receive a copy of the summary mentioned above, please make sure that you include your address on the consent form.

Thank you for considering this request. The goal of this research is to investigate experiences and perceptions related to learners' psychosocial readiness to experience positive learning and growth within human service education and training. It is hoped that this study will provide insights for learners, faculty, centers for student success/administrators and admissions about identified tangible causes of high attrition rates and marginal achievements from a psychosocial perspective in order to more effectively address the ongoing issues of student readiness.

Sincerely,

Daniel J Criss

Graduate Student Educational Psychology

Program

Mount Saint Vincent University

Dr. Anne MacCleave

Associate Professor

Mount Saint Vincent University

I have read the consent form above and give permission to be audiotaped during this study.

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

I wish to receive a copy of the summary of results when it becomes available.

Mailing or E-mail Address: _____

Appendix D

Sept. 14, 2007

Dear Colleagues:

My name is Daniel Criss and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Educational Psychology program at Mount Saint Vincent University. I also teach in our Health and Human Services program. I would like you to participate in a research study of first year human services students and their perceptions of and experiences with human services education and training. As part of my thesis, this study will investigate psychosocial and academic readiness of first year learners in the human services program at the Truro campus. I am hoping for group participation and collaboration across several subgroups. The information gathered from group discussions will be used to understand and identify themes, trends, similarities and differences across individual experiences and perspectives. The project will be under the supervision of Dr. Anne MacCleave.

Fonda Smyth will be moderating three focus groups consisting of second year human service students, human service faculty and the Centre for Student Success staff/academic chairs. A series of focus group research questions have been designed for you as well as a separate series of focus group questions for the students. The focus groups will take place during the 2007 fall semester at the Truro campus. Your focus group and that of your colleagues will both consist of 8 persons whereas the student focus groups will consist of twelve students. A random process will be used to select the required number for each group if more volunteer to participate than are required. The focus group session will take one to one and a half hours to complete.

Before beginning the focus group, I will describe the study and participants will have an opportunity to ask questions about the project. I will also offer you the opportunity to debrief your focus group experience with me after the session is complete and will provide you with contact information. You will be given a consent form to read and sign. You may refuse to answer any question during group discussions and may withdraw from the focus group at any time. I will audio-tape the focus group sessions in order to fully attend to what is being shared and you will be asked for your permission to audio-tape the session.

During the focus group, you will be invited to discuss student motivations, their psychosocial and academic readiness for enrolling in the human services program and student expectations of postsecondary education, adult learning practices and the teaching philosophy of learner centeredness. You will also be encouraged to discuss the program's ability to meet student expectations, its relevance for meeting workplace demands, its challenges and demands and the availability of supports for students

The study is of minimal risk to participants. All information collected during the study will be confidential, and narratives of background information cannot be used to identify individuals. Participants will be identified with pseudonyms in the transcriptions of the tapes, in the report of the study and in any resulting publications. Participants will also be presented with a Form of Confidentiality. All participants will be informed of the importance of maintaining confidentiality and urged to maintain the anonymity of group members. The groups' discussion will be audio-taped for transcribing and analysis. These audio-tapes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office and accessed only by the researcher and his supervisor. Consent forms will be stored separately from audio-tapes in a locked filing cabinet and shredded immediately after completion of the study. Written transcripts of the focus groups will be shredded and both audiotapes and computer files of transcripts will be erased upon completion of the study.

Written transcriptions of the focus group sessions will be available for your review and then returned to the researcher. You will receive a summary of the results when the study is completed. Your contributions will be acknowledged anonymously within the Acknowledgement section of the Thesis document.

In you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me (daniel.criss@nsc.ca) or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Anne MacCleave, (902-457-6182; anne.maccleave@msvu.ca). Additionally, if you have questions about how this study is being conducted, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, who is not directly involved in the study at 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca

Thank you for considering this request. It is hoped that this study will provide insights for learners, faculty, Centre for Student Success staff/academic chairs and admissions about identified successes, challenges and available or unavailable supports in order to more effectively address the ongoing issues of student readiness in a learner-centered environment.

Sincerely,

Daniel J Criss, Graduate Student
Educational Psychology Program
Mount Saint Vincent University

Dr. Anne MacCleave
Associate Professor
Mount Saint Vincent University

Appendix E

Sept. 14, 2007

Dear Kevin:

In addition to teaching in our Faculty of Health and Human Services at the Truro campus of the Nova Scotia Community College, I am also a graduate student in the Master of Arts in Educational Psychology program at Mount Saint Vincent University. As part of my thesis research, I would like to conduct three focus groups consisting of twelve second year human service students, eight human service faculty and a combined group of staff from the Centre for Student Success and academic chairs of the Truro campus (totalling eight persons). These focus groups will participate in a research study of the first year human service program and participant's perceptions of and experiences with human services education and training. More specifically, this study will investigate psychosocial development and academic readiness of first year learners to be successful in their studies and the personal growth work that is part of the education and training. Group participation and collaboration across several subgroups is desired. The information gathered from group discussions will be used to understand and identify themes, trends, similarities and differences across individual experiences and perceptions. The project will be under the supervision of Dr. Anne MacCleave.

Fonda Smyth will be moderating the three focus groups. Each will take approximately one to one and a half hours to complete. A series of focus group research questions have been designed for students as well as a separate series of focus group questions for faculty and Center for Student Success staff/academic chairs. The focus groups will take place during the 2007 fall semester at the Truro campus. I will recruit student participants through posters describing the focus groups. Interested students who contact me will be presented with information letters describing the focus groups. Faculty members will be recruited during a faculty meeting and be given information letters and all staff at the Centre for Student Success will be contacted through email and given information letters. A random process will be used to select the required number of participants if more volunteer than are required to fill each of the three groups. Before beginning the focus group, I will describe the study and participants will have an opportunity to ask questions about the project. I will also offer the opportunity for debriefing to individuals upon request following each focus group session. I will inform participants how they can contact me when the group is finished. If participants have any further questions or concerns about the conduct of the study, they will also be given contact information for my thesis supervisor or the Chair of the Mount Saint Vincent University Ethics Review Board.

A consent form will be read to participants and they will be asked to sign this form before beginning the research. Those who participate in the study may refuse to answer any question during group discussions and they may withdraw from the study at any time. Student participants will be reassured that their participation in the focus group will in no way impact their academic standing in their programs. The research will be qualitative to ensure that the research is

descriptive and relevant to the needs and interests of learners and other stakeholders who have common concerns with retention, student success and employability of human services graduates. I will audio tape the focus group sessions with permission from participants in order to fully attend to what is being shared. Contributions of participants will be acknowledged anonymously within the Acknowledgements section of the thesis document and they will be given the opportunity to review the written transcripts for accuracy.

The study is minimal risk to participants. All information collected during the study will be confidential, and narratives of background information cannot be used to identify individual participants. The groups' discussion will be audio-taped for transcribing and analysis and will be destroyed once this process is complete. All information gathered will be used only by the researcher and his supervisor and will be kept confidential. Consent forms will be shredded immediately after completion of the study. Written transcripts of the focus groups will be shredded and both audiotapes and computer files of transcripts will be erased upon completion of the study. A copy of the thesis will be presented to you and [Suzanne Drapeau with the Institution Research Department](#). A summary of results will be given to focus group participants and any interested non participants.

In you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me (daniel.criss@nsc.ca) or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Anne MacCleave, (902-457-6182; anne.maccleave@msvu.ca). Additionally, if you have questions about how this study is being conducted, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research and International Office, who is not directly involved in the study at 457-6350 or via e-mail at research@msvu.ca

It is hoped that this study will provide insights for learners, faculty, Centre for Student Success staff/academic chairs and admissions about identified successes, challenges and available or unavailable supports in order to more effectively address the ongoing issues of student readiness in a learner-centered environment.

Sincerely,

Daniel J Criss, Graduate Student
Educational Psychology Program

Dr. Anne MacCleave
Associate Professor