

A SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING LIFE

**A Meaningful Practice:
Self-Directed Learning as Impetus for Self-Growth**

Thomas R. Robles

Ontario College of Art and Design, Toronto

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Introduction

Personally and professionally, I believe in learning that is interesting, sufficiently challenging and focusing on the learning process itself. I find informal, Self-Directed Learning particularly effective not only in achieving an end but also in providing fulfillment and affirmation. Self-Directed Learning provides a cycle of beginnings and endings as one step of a process is initiated and then completed; completion naturally gives way to initiation in a perpetual, ascending, spiral-like effect. For practical reasons, however, Western society has tended to favour formal learning with its adherence to a curriculum, progress as reflected in grades and the valuing of teaching methodologies and skills (Chovanec, 1998).

As an advocate of Self-Directed Learning, I appreciate how this graduate program has introduced me to philosophies, perspectives and research methodologies that have reconciled the standardization imposed by the post-secondary experience with the humanistic principles I believe are necessary to ensure sound, meaningful learning and community building in the classroom. In this program, I have learned the value of reflecting on my experiences and to ascertain how much learning can be attributed to self-initiative. This reflective essay re-traces my steps through this program and recounts and muses on the many projects, essays and experiences that have provided me with a greater sense of myself as a learner and an educator. Combined they have been a source of personal and professional satisfaction.

The Learning Plan

Initial Goals for the Program

In the Learning Plan, a document indicating what learners intended to accomplish in this graduate program (see APPENDIX 2), I expressed an interest in the area of Self-Directed Learning because at the time, I was teaching adult immigrant and international students whose life experiences seemed to parallel my own. Observing and interacting with them led me to believe that, despite being accustomed to a more instructor-centered approach to learning, they too, were receptive to learning that entailed self-initiative, discussion and collaboration. The realization that learning is an individual experience led to my interest in Self-Directed Learning.

Self-Directed Learning, the informal and personal acquisition of knowledge through learner-based initiatives, had been an integral part of my personal and teaching practice even before I learned of the concept. After reading more about this approach, however, I was able to identify which of my practices were characteristic of Self-Directed Learning, and strove to implement more of them. These included class presentations and group discussions whose topics were student-initiated; small group research activities involving collaborative, co-operative learning; and the encouragement of self-reflection. This discovery was highly affirming; however, I felt restricted by the institutional standards I was obligated to uphold. Part of my goal at the start of this program, therefore, was to explore ways to reconcile the formal, standardized learning imposed by the post-secondary experience and the self-initiated, informal approach characteristic of Self-Directed Learning. I also wanted to explore the kinds of tools that motivate students to learn. (for more: http://www.tomrobes.com/wp_sdl_intro.html)

Motivation to Learn

At the early stages of the program I was interested in empowering and cultivating self-reliance in students in general and adult immigrant and international students in particular. Having heard of how their experiences of living in a foreign country often resulted in exclusion, marginalization and alienation, I felt a connection because of the similar ways my immigrant experiences had affected me.

The first few years of my life in Canada are memorable because despite being filled with renewed hope and the excitement of new opportunities for my family, I was terrified for much of the time. I was painfully shy and self-conscious, and I feared making mistakes. The nuns at the private school I had attended in the Philippines, my birthplace, had instilled in me impossibly high expectations for achievement. Compounding this was my determination to be accepted by my peers, which did little to ease the social and academic pressures I felt.

My interest in Self-Directed Learning, therefore, is predicated on my long-standing desire to free myself from the control I perceived others—parents, instructors, friends, mentors and priests—had over me. I believed that if I could learn to do things on my own, I would no longer be at the mercy of others. As a young adult, this desire to become (intellectually and emotionally) independent led me to explore fields and interests outside of the academic environment, particularly in the areas of fashion design, a passion I have had since I was a child. This not only allowed me the freedom to create but it was also affirming because such skills cultivated a sense of ownership and empowerment, which also motivated me to learn further.

How I Learn

Learning how to sew is symbolic of how having a genuine interest in something—in this case fashion design—provides a basis for learning about it. Initially, I was solely interested in how clothing was designed: the number of panels comprising a garment, the fabric(s) used and the colours chosen. I avidly read about fashion history and became interested in clothing construction. I could not find ready-made clothes that I liked or that fit, so learning about fashion inspired me to create clothing for myself. With time, however, my focus changed from the end product, that is, a finished piece of clothing, to the process of creating it; quality of workmanship became my obsession (for more: http://www.tomrobes.com/wp_thomas_robes_couture_intro.html.)

In this graduate program, the experience has been similar. Each of its stages, when completed, creates a sense of closure and accomplishment that are important elements of the learning process. Closely examining a topic or object helps me better understand and internalize information about it. What I enjoy about researching a topic is the never-ending cycle of discovery that it inevitably results in. Being interested in a topic is a given, so maintaining motivation and enthusiasm has, thus far, not been an issue. The topics I have researched and have written about were related to and, therefore, contextualized by my professional work.

Learning Intents

Through my experiences with learning, I developed an interest in how students are motivated to learn. At the time I started this graduate program, I wanted to ‘adjust’ a teaching approach to facilitate learning and attain a level of humanism in teaching methodology and practice, which, according to my Learning Style (LSI) and Philosophy of Adult Education (PAEI) inventories, reflect my general teaching philosophy and

approach (see APPENDICES 3 & 4). Both indicate a preference for learning in a collaborative, facilitative way, reflecting a humanistic philosophy. I read about the ‘Twelve Principles for Effective Adult Learning’ in the work of Vella (2002). These employ a humanistic approach to learning through dialogue, and have at their foundation, a belief in quantum theory—the belief in the universal synergy that interconnects all—which assesses learning from a specific context. These 12 educational principles are ones that may be applied to all teaching and considers factors such as needs assessment (see APPENDIX 5), safety (in the environment) and sound relationships (Vella, 2002). At the time I started the program, I wanted to implement these principles in the classes I taught. I believed Vella’s 12 principles provided a tangible context within which Self-Directed Learning could be incorporated into my teaching practice because both shared principles predicated on self-initiative, collaboration, dialogue and self-reflection (praxis).

Learning Contract and Timeline

At the time of the Orientation, I created a Learning Contract (see APPENDIX 1), which defined my goals, provided a purpose for my studies and reflected my growing interest in Self-Directed Learning. I began applying this approach to the classes I was teaching at that time. I had intended to develop lesson plans that incorporated Vella’s 12 principles for effective adult learning as well as a professional development session with instructors on the topic of Self-Directed Learning to be conducted between January and April 2004. I had also intended to use the annotations of relevant literature, my own journal entries, feedback from students, videotape footage and discussions to help achieve these goals. These intentions, however, were compromised by logistical

constraints I had not anticipated. I was, however, able to focus on elements of Self-Directed Learning in my own class. Students, for instance, were encouraged to discuss and engage in oral presentations on topics as diverse as the environment, peer pressure, poverty, and female genital mutilation. Criteria for composing these were provided but were also flexible, allowing for personal interpretation. As for introducing Self-Directed Learning as a methodological approach during a professional development session, I was limited by such sessions taking place only twice a year at the institution I worked for. I lacked the confidence and ability to discuss Self-Directed Learning-related activities in the initial stages of this program and so was apprehensive about endorsing them, despite having already adopted many of its principles.

Insights about Myself

Reticence is characteristic of my personality. Reflecting on self-initiated projects, it is only when I feel comfortable with a process and can repeatedly execute it with ease resulting in similar outcomes that I feel sufficiently knowledgeable and comfortable to advocate it. This has served me well in some ways as an instructor, because critically questioning my abilities has developed into a capacity to empathize with, listen to, observe, assess and affirm students (see APPENDIX 8); this accommodation also creates a congenial environment that is conducive to learning. By doing so, I gain students' respect, trust and their willingness to learn from and interact with me. Such favourable results underscore the importance of learning through collaboration where equality between instructor and student is essential to the learning experience. Characteristic of this learning dynamic are critical thinking and questioning, which obviate the notion of

“the instructor as expert”. I believe this puts students at ease and is conducive to implementing a Self-Directed Learning approach in the classroom.

Awareness of my strengths and weaknesses is advantageous; however, when taken to extremes, it can result in being easily undermined or usurped by others. Inevitably, acceptance of my own knowledge as sufficiently reliable and trustworthy to assert is crucial. Based on personal experience, it is the recognition of the boundaries where my level of expertise lies and where it does not that determines how effective I am as an instructor. Coupled with course evaluation surveys conducted at the end of a term (see APPENDIX 9) and self-reflection, such insights help me recognize personal and/or professional issues that affect me either positively or negatively, which I can then choose to address.

Section Two: Orientation/Post-Orientation Phase

Initial Experiences as an Adult Learner in this Program: Challenges and Insights

My first forays into the adult education field led me to wonder about how to ethically apply and practice some of the principles and methodologies outlined in the literature. In the program, initial challenges include reconciling the notion of feedback with the notion of grading as emblematic of progress, success or compliance with a particular standard. At the time, progress and evaluation were, for me, still synonymous with external symbols such as grades.

At this time, I took a methodical approach to the course work. It was a fairly extensive process; however, the exercise compelled me to thoroughly internalize the information I was reading. Despite this approach, I often feared that what I had to say

was not valid, important or comprehensible to others; yet it was the creative process—each step leading to the eventual completion of the project—as well as a genuine interest in this program that has maintained my enthusiasm for it.

The time factor was an on-going concern due to the numerous professional, academic, personal and voluntary commitments I was involved in concurrent to being in this program. On the other hand, I appreciated how studying part time has resulted in a symbiosis between my academic, professional and personal lives. All have come to influence and inform the other, facilitating a thorough and profound understanding of key concepts.

(for more: http://www.tomrobes.com/wp_masters_adult_ed_orientation_intro.htm).

Section Three: Learning Program Design Phase, AE500 and AE510

Formulating Learning Goals and Writing a Personal Narrative

Writing learning goals and a personal narrative helped me to reflect on my progress in the program by comparing my initial intentions with how those intentions have evolved over time. As a result of these reflections and self-evaluations, I chose topics that focused on the foundations of adult education; the reading, research and writing process; adult learning; facilitation and teaching; program planning and development; and queer theory and sexuality.

As my understanding of the historical and philosophical contexts of the adult education field deepened, I became fascinated with how, throughout history, education was used to improve the lives of adults outside traditional learning environments such as universities and colleges. Initially, I focused on research conducted with those who have

had to contend with great obstacles in life and how they overcame them. Whether these obstacles were related to gender, culture, language, learning ability or sexual orientation, I was inspired by how (informal) learning was used to overcome limitations and to, ultimately, transform lives. In particular, I appreciated reading the seminal work of Freire (1970, 1993) about the education of the underprivileged; Candy's (1991) and Knowles' (1975) focus on Self-Directed Learning; Elias and Merriam's articles (1995) on the philosophies of adult education; Lindeman's (1982) belief in the meaning adult education can confer on life; Cunningham's more recent writings (1989) on the detrimental effects of the 'professionalizing' of adult education; and the inspiring work of bell hooks (1994, 2003) focusing on class, race and education and their impact on lives. Later, as I continued reading, taking notes and reflecting on these articles, I became intrigued by the historical and philosophical work of Selman et al. (1998); Collins (1989); Bergmann (2001) and MacKeracher (1997), and how significantly these influence progressive education. By comparing the work of early adult educators to the work I was doing in the classroom, I became fascinated by how earlier forms of liberal education, which tended to take a rigorous approach to scientific investigation, emphasizing absolute truth and discipline, have gradually embraced a more humanistic stance in teaching, emphasizing personal growth for social change.

The personal statement I wrote during orientation (see APPENDIX 2) reflects the educational experiences of my undergrad and early post-undergrad years. This reflection allowed me to distinguish between teaching experiences I considered ideal and those I did not. For instance, there were courses or individuals throughout my university career that inspired me to take a more pro-active stance in my education. I found it particularly

stimulating when lectures accommodated discussion. In the past, I primarily engaged in learning characterized by left-brain logic: attention to detail and order, an overemphasis on facts and rules, a focus on words and language and a bias favouring ‘reality’. As an instructor, I was inspired to find ways for students to take a whole-brain approach to problem solving. I also wanted to focus on feelings; the imagination; seeing the “big picture”; and the spontaneous, fantasy-based risk taking of right-brain functions.

Formulating a learning plan helped me reflect on distinctions between traditional and self-directed approaches to education and the essential factors on which these distinctions were based. For instance, adult education, whose history lies in popular grass roots movements, volunteerism, social and political movements and rural community activities whose goals included self improvement and change, contrasts with those of traditional education with its emphasis on professionalization and the creation of a discipline-based structure that narrows focus and marginalizes those who do not fit in. Learning about these distinctions, therefore, allowed me to reflect on and develop my own teaching principles. A learning plan also helped to narrow my search for a focus within the field of adult education by critically reflecting on my own teaching experiences. I want students to learn for themselves and to enjoy the learning process because it is learning that is achieved through self-motivation.

What I learned in this process was that second language learning precludes conventional forms of education such as rigid curricula, rote testing and learning in isolated, unrealistic classroom environments. Alternative teaching methods, on the other hand, can simulate real life. In one program, for instance, learners acquired linguistic skills that introduced them to the conventions of North American post-secondary

education. These include critical reading and writing, discussion, oral presentations and (English) vocabulary acquisition based on daily life experiences (see APPENDICES 6 & 7). Such exercises are often intimidating to learners who originate from cultures where a student-centered approach is not practised or encouraged. Yet, they can be liberating and affirming when initiated with the same learners. Being provided with tools and resources that encourage independent, Self-Directed Learning was appealing to such learners as well.

Annotation Bibliography: Challenges and Insights

At the time I started the program, I was teaching adult immigrant and international students exclusively. A year later, I relocated to a larger city and started teaching at an art and design college; my research focus, therefore, shifted to reflect this change. I realized that although adult immigrant and international students who study in Canada have great challenges imposed on them, there are others who also face extraordinary challenges that were not being met at the post-secondary level. These challenges include learning disabilities left undiagnosed; biases as a result of age, gender or sexual orientation; culture-based factors that inhibit Canadian students from self-identifying as empowered individuals; and a rapidly changing, technology-based society that induces conformity at any cost and regardless of whether its offerings are well suited to the individual.

At this time, I added to my annotated bibliography the work of Ellsworth (1989), Gardner (1999), Freire (1973, 1993) and hooks (1994, 1997, 2003). All were proponents of human rights and the idea that education can be a vehicle to attaining liberation. Two books by hooks—“Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations” (1994) and “Wounds of

Passion: A Writing Life” (1997)—opened my eyes to the process of critical thinking. As a member of a visible minority group, I questioned whether I had failed to confront racist, sexist or oppressive attitudes towards me. If so, had I simply ignored these for the sake of maintaining the status quo or because of fears of others’ reactions should I confront them? Conversely, had there been times when I had been dismissive of others based on race, gender or sexual orientation? At this time, I considered taking a more open, inquisitive stance in class in order to ascertain how the adult immigrant and international students I was teaching would respond to the question of discrimination.

Through my readings, I became enthusiastic about teaching methodologies that embodied a humanistic approach to learning, which could then be used to address social, political and economic issues. hooks’s writings, for instance, encourage self-awareness and reiterate the distinction between taking responsibility for one’s self and existing within institutional discrimination. From her work I learned that one cannot take responsibility for this phenomenon; however, one should take responsibility for how to respond to it. I also appreciated hooks’s advocacy of expressing dissent and her insistence on discourse and debate even at the risk of hurt feelings; if speaking out results in more knowledge or progress, then it may be a valuable exercise in which to engage. I find this affirming because I have been a dissenting voice on many occasions and have felt shut down by others. I wondered whether students I have taught have had the same experiences. If so, what as their instructor, could I do to help them overcome the obstacles that silence them?

Brookfield’s article “The Concept of Critically Reflective Practice” (2000) focuses on critical reflection and, in particular, praxis—the concept of action with subsequent

reflection—that is based on the notion that individuals create their own realities. To then engage in praxis collectively and collaboratively is, Brookfield feels, one of the best approaches to educating adults.

I appreciated how these writers' beliefs challenge educational conventions that undermine the way people learn through a narrow definition of intelligence. I appreciated how each acknowledged the power that individuals have to change their lives through self-education. These readings, however, were also challenging because despite wanting to embrace them, I was uncertain about whether I had the confidence to do so. I was also uncertain about how to implement the principles they advocated in an environment to which they seemed incompatible.

As I continued my readings, there were times I felt overwhelmed and confused by so much information and was unable to organize the information in a coherent way. My eventual relocation to a different university also led me to question whether I should maintain my focus on adult immigrant and international students or expand it to include all students because of the change in the student demographic I was teaching. Looking further into this phenomenon was especially crucial for adult immigrant and international students because of the inherent cultural implications that ignore or deny their voices. As a tutor, I worked with these students on an individual basis and discovered that I could address issues in a way that would have been impossible in groups. I discovered that individuals have very different needs as a result of their circumstances, so felt that teaching requires facilitation rather than expertise (see APPENDIX 5). I wanted to know if adult immigrant and international students could use Self-Directed Learning techniques to develop self-study, self-correcting and self-awareness skills because these were ones

the institution I worked in advocated. I was worried, however, that the scope of the inquiry was becoming too large for the purposes of this program. (for more:

http://www.tomrobes.com/wp_masters_adult_ed_learning_plan_annotated_bibliography_intro.htm)

Literature Review: Challenges and Insights

In preparing for the literature review, I focused on resources that highlighted how individuals are marginalized because of gender, race, class, sexual orientation or learning disabilities. These included academic articles and books by Anderson and Lux (2005); Arries (1999); Beck (1997), Bergmann (2001), Bloom et al. (1956); and Brinckerhoff et al. (1992). I had felt marginalized to a certain degree by similar circumstances when I was a student, so by searching for ways to resolve these issues, I hoped to mitigate the obstacles my own students faced as well as reflect on how I, myself, may have perpetuated them. Despite not directly referring to these concepts, much of my readings centred on the notion of affirmation or love, which all human beings desire. Writing this literature review also introduced me to the idea of individuals learning in different ways and the benefit of learning through dialogue, which facilitates an equitable learning environment between instructor (as facilitator) and student (as learner). In this learning environment there is a consistent effort to cultivate independent learning skills in students, which may be defined as the ability to engage in self-study, self-correction and self-reflection in the context of their work.

Initially, I found it overwhelming to review all the various areas of adult education. I felt uncertain about my interpretations of and responses to the readings. It was also difficult to maintain balance between expediting the writing of the literature review and the enjoyment of the writing process itself. Ensuring a balance has been one of the

biggest challenges of this program. I tried to write in a systematic way, but sometimes it was difficult to do so particularly when I was also involved in extra-curricular activities. This resulted in a piecemeal approach to writing: I would write for short periods of time then engage in other activities prior to resuming and completing the writing process. As a result, I feared that a loss in momentum would lead to a loss of enthusiasm for this project; so, I tried working on the review daily regardless of how much time I could devote to it. The writing process took 4 months to complete.

Conveying ideas clearly and cogently; ensuring that facts are accurate; presenting varied viewpoints, philosophies and theories; recounting these with a critical eye; and ensuring that the audience is clearly identified are factors that comprise a good essay. These are challenging to attain, yet I learned much about the process. Because this review was the first in a series of research papers, I hoped to excel in the writing process for its own end. One of the biggest challenges in writing it was presenting an array of work that was a balanced representation of the literature relative to my growing interest in a specific area of the field. I consistently felt compelled to add to my readings because I felt what I had acquired at a certain stage was inadequate. This, however, caused great anxiety because of the time it took to collect, review and incorporate the new readings, in addition to the new uncertainties that arose as a result of these additions. Did they shed any more light on my focus than if they had not been added? Were they mere distractions? Such angst occurred regularly in the middle stages of writing the review.

As my writing progressed, however, I felt the weight of expectation lifting as I allowed myself to revel in the ideas that flowed. Even when I felt blocked I discovered how inspiration would, once again, lead me to the appropriate information or knowledge.

I cannot explain how this works; however, it is partly related to engaging in rigorous self-inquiry about what it is that leads me to feel a particular way. This, sooner or later, produces sensible answers. It is the willingness to explore aspects of my thought patterns that proved effective in identifying stumbling blocks. This is partly what makes the writing process fulfilling for me.

(for more: http://www.tomrobes.com/wp_masters_adult_ed_lit_review_&_prof_portfolio_intro.htm)

Professional Portfolio: Challenges and Insights

In creating the professional portfolio, I chose an electronic version because an e-based professional portfolio—in essence, a website—would be accessible from anywhere and facilitate regular updates, digital images and result in a more professional, polished look. In paper format, the same amount of information might result in an unwieldy portfolio that would be difficult to organize, access and require more time and effort to physically create. Creating an e-based portfolio, however, posed challenges not the least of which was my lack of familiarity with HTML (HyperText Markup Language), the language of web design. Because I did not have an information technology background, I had great doubt about whether I would be able to accomplish what I envisioned. On-going reading and experimentation, therefore, were crucial and took more than 3 months to accomplish.

The creation of this website-portfolio involved two steps: researching the website-creation process and determining the contents of the portfolio. The accurate use of HTML is crucial in the technical process of creating a website because it determines formatting. Omitting or incorrectly inputting HTML results in gibberish text, often unnoticeable until

the webpage is seen through a web browser, by which time it was also publicly accessible. Other factors that compounded the learning process included how different web browsers read HTML slightly differently. One may present a webpage in its desired form while another may show the same webpage with flaws in formatting. There are also the different effects web browsers (e.g.: Internet Explorer, Firefox Mozilla, Opera and Safari) used for both PC and Mac computers produce. The first set of web pages I produced numbered 25, so proofing them thoroughly through various web browsers proved labour intensive, an exercise compounded by the highly complex and dense HTML, which was especially difficult on the eyes.

Determining the contents of this website-portfolio entailed devising criteria that could act as guides. This included identifying my intended audience and ensuring that information presented to them was accessible, comprehensible and relevant; ensuring that each web page was simple, consistent, navigable and visually attractive; ensuring that documents included were prefaced so that a context to which the audience could relate was established; presenting information that reflects evolution and critical reflection in my work as a student and professional; and providing a forum in which the audience may offer feedback. In considering its design, the portfolio has allowed me to present a more comprehensive overview of my personal, professional, academic and volunteer experiences. Access and intelligibility are especially important to visual learners who often find text-heavy formats difficult to internalize. Finally, I also appreciate how the on-going maintenance of this portfolio facilitates new ways to creatively present information. (for more http://www.tomrobes.com/wp_creating_this_website-portfolio)

Working on the portfolio allowed me to reflect on my own learning, examining the

many paths taken and the ways I respond to them. I learned to appreciate the challenges involved in learning a new skill and to suspend expectations of perfection. As someone who appreciates the learning process for its own sake, the recognition that errors were inherent in this process was one that helped mitigate the frustrations. I also realized that perfection is achieved through an evolutionary process not as a state that precedes this process. Through a change in perception, not only was I able to relinquish the frustration that can accompany the learning process, the experience of creating this website portfolio confirmed that I have the ability to accomplish tasks I had never expected possible given my relative lack of knowledge about and experience with information technology. Web design is a process: a series of steps that facilitates realizing a concept. What I discovered, just as I had in learning how to sew, was the joy of the journey itself; however, I also like how the end result compels me to engage in similar projects. In this sense, creativity can be a self-fulfilling cycle: I learn to create something, and in turn, the experience transforms me. I am compelled to learn anew.

What I Would Do Differently.

Not having had any formal training in website creation, I spent much time learning about the fundamental and technical elements on my own. I could have benefited from collaborating with those knowledgeable in website design. I consulted on technical issues with the web designer at my workplace, but only at the final stages of the design and creation process when my knowledge and experience were no longer adequate for what I wanted to further achieve. Perhaps starting the collaboration earlier would have saved time. My collaborative efforts with the web designer reflect one of the characteristics of Self-Directed Learning: learning from an ‘expert’ who informs, facilitates independence

and then allows for ample practice by the learner.

Taking some classes on basic web design, which for the sake of avoiding time spent on learning fundamental elements on my own, may have proved a more efficient approach to learning. Classes may have also provided some opportunities to socially interact with others with similar interests. There is also, however, the cost and time commitment factors of formal classes in addition to the risk of a class not fulfilling expectations that one needs to consider. I like individually experimenting with new knowledge and skills, despite the process being at times frustrating, confusing and bewildering, so perhaps I had made what for me were the most appropriate choices. True affirmation can only result from owning the learning experience, which relinquishing it to someone else may compromise. Despite the frustrations these challenges presented, I felt that the exercise of learning about website creation was in keeping with the theme of Self-Directed Learning: I, the learner, was interested in accomplishing a specific task so sought a way to achieve it using informal means.

Recommendations for Future Learners.

Engaging in the AE510 phase taught me about critical thinking. Examining and reflecting on these projects, I was able to draw on all aspects of my life: the personal, professional, academic and creative. I would, therefore, advise future learners to approach this phase from a holistic perspective, extensively reflecting on and writing about aspects of oneself in order to recognize latent skills that lie dormant.

In reflecting on content, it is important for learners to consider their audience and ensure the provision of sufficient, intelligible information. For this project, I identified my audience as the ‘educated non-specialist’: individuals with enough knowledge about

and experience in a variety of fields but who may not be familiar with specific aspects of adult education. Regularly, I would discover after reviewing documents, a lack of sufficient background information that was crucial to ensuring understanding. One challenge, therefore, was maintaining balance between providing comprehensible, cogent information and avoiding verbosity.

Creating this website-portfolio confirms the notion that learning is never ending. Indeed, despite its completion and evaluation I still feel inclined to periodically expand and revise it, recently adding an “Interests and Activities” section, which focuses on my interests in fashion and interior design, architecture, alternative film, music and volunteerism. In doing so, I can continually engage in self-reflection and the potential to expand my learning skills, which, in the context of Self-Directed Learning, is relevant.

(for more: <http://www.tomrobes.com/homepage.htm>)

Section Four: Project Phase AE 520

Research Project Design and Implementation

On consultation with my advisor, I decided that the research project would ascertain the experiences of adult immigrant and international students with Self-Directed Learning: what worked for them, what they liked about it, incidents where they learned things on their own, the tools they used and how they felt at the end of it. The proposal was for data to be drawn from interviews conducted with students and instructors and from my own notes based on observations of students. My advisor referred me to established protocols that would help in designing interview questions that were ethically conscious and would elicit responses that reflected participants’ true experiences.

Learning about Action Research, the methodological approach I used to conduct this research, has been the most valuable lesson of all. I had always thought that in order to conduct rigorous, valid research, a systematic, scientific and objective approach was necessary. Action Research is based on the view that individuals, in interaction with their social worlds, construct their own reality. This approach seeks to understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and the meanings they attribute to their experiences. Using Action Research for this research project was appropriate because there is little knowledge about the question I had identified. The design of the study is formulated while the research is in progress rather than being totally pre-determined prior to its start, and the results may be immediately applied (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). In this project, Action Research was used to obtain knowledge that reflects a particular situation or group of individuals. The problem was stated generally and hypotheses were not proposed. The core of this research involved data collection, because it is these that one can learn from the most. What is uncovered is then mediated through my own description and interpretation of the phenomenon.

Research Project Description.

This research project involved conducting semi-structured interviews of 3 adult immigrant and international students and 3 instructors who have experience teaching such students at my workplace, the Ontario College of Art & Design. Its main goal was to determine how adult immigrant and international students at the post-secondary level learn and specifically whether they are able to adopt Self-Directed Learning skills. This question is significant because Self-Directed Learning is a western-based learning approach, so it is unknown whether adult immigrant and international students can adopt

it. All of the student participants were female; 2 were from Korea and one was from China. Interviews were approximately 1 hour long. Because the main purpose of the research was to ascertain whether adult immigrant and international students are able to direct their own learning, this research project focused mainly on students' experiences with (self-directed) learning and the effects these had on their academic, social and personal lives. Although this project provides recommendations on specific tools and resources that may encourage Self-Directed Learning, the project does not focus on the development of these tools or resources; however, the project may be used to inform future resource development and creation. Developing self-directed learning skills would be advantageous for students to practise because it can lead to autonomy, self-study, self-correction, and self-reflection, skills that are advocated at the post-secondary institution where I teach.

Meeting the Learning Intents and Purposes.

Obtaining the data for this research project entailed creating a protocol that accurately reflects the question or problem being investigated. What I learned, however, was that such protocols already exist, so I e-mailed Roger Hiemstra, one of the foremost practitioners of Self-Directed Learning, to obtain them. Hiemstra recommended adapting the original protocol (no date) of Allan Tough, an early pioneer of Self-Directed Learning, which has regularly been used in the past and whose relevance to my research project was evident.

Conducting the Research: Results and Outcomes

Based on the interview results, the evidence is consistent: adult immigrant and international students can practice Self-Directed Learning through interest in a subject

matter; the introduction of new knowledge using techniques that contextualize material; that allow students to easily relate to it; and that facilitate autonomy, curiosity, joy and affirmation. Interview responses also indicate a strong interest in learning new things, especially those with some connection to the student's past learning experiences or achievements. In the context of the institutional setting in which this research project was conducted—one which promotes and encourages self-study, self-correction and self-awareness—self-directed learning skills defined within these parameters can be adapted by adult immigrant and international students. Common motivating factors include a genuine curiosity in learning a new skill, the desire to change or improve one's current life or professional circumstances and the pleasure of accomplishment or mastery over a new skill.

The Research Project: Challenges, Insights and Implications.

Using Action Research within a post-secondary setting, I have learned that Self-Directed Learning has a broad scope and varied applications. As a process it requires a context, which can yield very different results. In reality, it is a continuum in which both instructor and learner are willing to relinquish some responsibilities in the teaching and learning dynamic. Such a notion confirms that autonomy is necessary to learn and also challenges one to think critically about how to situate oneself within a learning area. This is crucial because Self-Directed Learning is generally regarded as learning with little external guidance and formal training. Where I work, for instance, there has been an effort to encourage students to cultivate skills in self-study, self-correction and self-reflection as ways to develop autonomy in learning. Whether in the development of new teaching resources, tools or methodologies, this effort affects the way students (and

instructors) perceive their reality, underscoring the importance of the individual's learning experience. Conducting Action Research in this environment, therefore, can act as a reminder of the importance of the individual's role in the creation of his or her own reality. This consideration is crucial, not only in cultivating self-directed learning skills, but also in addressing learning needs. For me, this has been revelatory because in working with students on an individual basis, I have learned not to make presumptions about or apply the same teaching approaches to all of them. Further, because the institution for which I work also advocates the importance of individual work and achievement, using Action Research as a methodological approach may reveal many aspects of students' learning experiences. This research project revealed my propensity to generalize the character and experiences of students into one category and how doing so can be undermining and misrepresentative. Action Research has taught me that students are individuals first with unique sets of needs and goals. That said I have learned that Self-Directed Learning need not preclude an instructor-centered approach where the introduction of new knowledge requires learning about it from an "expert", underscoring the notion that Self-Directed Learning can enhance collaborative, co-operative learning for the achievement of common goals. Recognizing learners' ability to choose to learn dependently as well as independently, however, is equally important.

As an academic writing instructor, I have learned that students learn about critical reading, thinking and writing skills through working with sources, analysis and research. This is a great challenge for native-English speaking students in general and for adult immigrant and international students in particular. Teaching writing to those whose learning conventions are holistically different from those of North America or who,

because of their immigrant experience, may have never even learned to write in their own cultures, requires on-going support in the form of advising, one-on-one tutoring and the teaching of new academic conventions. Such approaches also cultivate students' sense of the North American post-secondary writing process, which becomes evident with time. Finally, I have learned that students prefer learning using visual imagery and practice because of the sense of immediacy such tools and approaches provide. They also facilitate self-reflection and a sense of progress in one's learning that is easily observed or felt. Using images and a hands-on approach, either as alternatives or as supplements to text, also contextualizes information, facilitating comprehension. These, in combination, entice students to further self-direct their own learning.

Facing the Challenges and Successes Encountered.

I had initially intended the research project to inform the creation or acquisition of tools and resources that would encourage adult immigrant and international students to become more self-directed in their approach to learning. Unfortunately, the logistics and time commitment involved made the project too unwieldy to conduct. My unfamiliarity with the research methodologies compounded these initial challenges especially in light of the stresses of obtaining approval from the Research Ethics Board of the institution where I am studying.

Another challenge was the concern colleagues at my workplace had about the validity of the project's data collection methodology. In particular, they questioned the small sampling of participants (3, in the case of this research project). In addition, there were questions about using subjective experiences as data which, given the nature of the research methodology, I had to defend. Colleagues seemed satisfied with my rationale for

using the Action Research methodology relative to my goals for the project, which strengthened their beliefs in and approval of the project.

Considering all factors was time consuming, compounding my fears of not having sufficient time to effectively conduct the project. I discovered, however, that relinquishing control of the uncontrollable was the best approach. Experience has taught me that circumstances have unexpected ways of inevitably working themselves out, which was certainly the case with this endeavour when, after only a few days of re-submitting a revised draft of the Research and Ethics Board Application form, the research project received approval.

During the planning of this research project certain weaknesses were identified, including the links between the problem and the methodology, which bring up ethical issues related to interviewing and disseminating the results. In addition, questions arose about whether the interviews would be sufficiently revelatory. The conclusion revealed that, in its current draft, the proposal was too large in scope to be practical. In order to satisfy the requirements of this program, I need only complete one part of a much larger effort, a work-in-progress that could be carried out at a later time. Revising the research project proposal to a more manageable effort did much to relieve my fears about completing it in a timely way.

In writing the research project report, I was uncertain about formatting and tone. Despite reading how Action Research focuses on the human experience, my first draft reflected my past experience writing scientific reports: highly objective, structured and formal. In my effort to maintain the confidentiality of participants' identities, I had assigned alphabetical letters to participants rather than pseudonyms and provided copious

verbatim quotes in tandem, believing this was the appropriate way to present participants. After submitting and receiving feedback on this draft, however, I learned that obscuring participant identities behind clinical labels, stacking extensive verbatim quotes with minimal inferences, and using formal language for the sake of maintaining confidentiality and objectivity, mitigates the purpose of Action Research. Subjective, personal experiences should be emphasized because it is these that lend a three-dimensional, genuine quality to the research, strengthening its validity and credibility. Failing to provide more inferences or interpretations of participants' responses obscured their humanity. The differences between the first and final drafts of the research project report reflect a remarkable change in my own perception of and approach to research-report writing. In the first draft, the report reads like a grocery list: dry, sterile and one-dimensional. The final draft of my research project report, on the other hand, strives to enliven participants and presents their experiences as truly and uniquely their own. Thus, they come alive and their experiences are ones to which readers are more likely to relate.

What I Would Do Differently.

Time was a consideration in planning and conducting this research project. Because it could only be carried out during the academic year, the project was limited to ascertaining whether adult immigrant and international students can be or have ever been self-directive. If I had had more time, I would have expanded the scope of the project to include the design, implementation and assessment of tools and resources for cultivating self-directed learning skills. This would have required more commitment not only in time but also in effort, which, for the purposes of expediting this degree, may have been unnecessary. However, expanding the project's scope in this way may be part of on-

going research conducted institutionally, contingent on the continued support of my workplace.

Because of the time of year, there were few students who responded to the invitation to participate. The cultural background and gender of participants were, therefore, determined by and limited to those who were willing and available to participate. If timing had been more favourable, I would have conducted this project earlier in the school year—perhaps in late fall—when students had time to adjust to their routines and when academic pressures were minimal, allowing for stress-free, purposeful participation. Perhaps a more diverse cultural sampling of students would also have been possible to obtain at this time. Conducting this project in the midst of participants’ academic experiences may also yield more considered responses because their circumstances would facilitate comparisons and contrasts. A favourable schedule may yield more student participants, specifically where a more culturally diverse selection of participants would more accurately reflect the institution’s student demographics, resulting in more varied responses. For this project, all of the student participants were female, and I am uncertain whether interviewing male students would have yielded significantly different responses. Are male adult immigrant and international students more likely or less likely to be receptive to engaging in Self-Directed Learning than their female counterparts? If level of receptivity to engaging in Self-Directed Learning were gender-specific, what are the factors to which these could be attributed? Finally, if I had had the opportunity to conduct this project at a larger institution, the exercise may have yielded responses and results that more holistically reflect the learning experiences of adult immigrant and international students who are not exclusively art and design

students. Do individuals with artistic inclinations tend to be, comparatively, more self-directed in their approach to learning because of their propensity for creativity and self-expression? If so, what would responses from adult immigrant and international students who are not artistically inclined be like? Such questions merit further investigation and may be linked to the thesis. (for more:

http://www.tomrobles.com/wp_masters_adult_ed_research_project_intro.htm)

The Research Project: Personal Challenges and Insights.

In conducting this research project, I learned to be even more attentive to the needs, goals and desires of students. In observation notes I had made on classes I have taught, I remarked on how interactive adult immigrant and international students have always been, a fact that the project confirmed. Such observations remind me of the value of listening and of suspending judgments about the learning abilities or cultural and educational disadvantages of students.

While conducting this project, I was struck by the seeming incongruity between students' demeanor and their true character, something I attributed to culture. In many cultures, however, one's public persona is cultivated to maintain social harmony; it is not necessarily reflective of one's true character, feelings or intentions. The recognition of these differences facilitates inquiry that can result in significant revelation.

In increasing opportunities for students to engage in Self-Directed Learning, I have learned to be more proactive about procuring information for, about and on behalf of students. In the past, I used to be reluctant to inquire about that which I had no knowledge, because I felt I should have already known the answer. I have realized, however, that the acquisition of accurate knowledge is more important than conveying an image of expertise. This latter attitude reflects my recent interest in ascertaining to what

learning may be attributed, which this research project has confirmed as a notion that can be explored, examined and acted on. At the latter stage of the research project, the question(s) I have now focus(es) on how much autonomous learning plays in successful learning.

Collaborating with others on this project, I learned how to respond with equanimity during difficult circumstances. I had felt perturbed, for instance, with some of the e-mail correspondence from the Dean assisting me with this project, leading me to question her intentions. Naturally, I sought ways to clarify and resolve the issue. Wisely, I waited before confronting her with these concerns so as not to undermine the amicable relationship we had formed. I later discovered that her intentions had been highly honourable. Her suggestions for the project's procedures, which entailed collaborating with colleagues familiar with the student demographics on which I would be focusing, was a suggestion meant to facilitate efficiency and inclusiveness. The logistics of conducting the project could be more complicated than anticipated because it was the end of the academic year when students, faculty and administrative staff had little time for anything other than their academic responsibilities. By taking a pre-emptive approach, therefore, the Dean was simply being helpful. Indeed, her initiative resulted in a highly productive exchange of ideas about how to recruit participants. Recognizing these factors in time did much to prevent unnecessary confrontation that could have compromised relationships in my workplace.

Mitigating or avoiding anxiety coupled with a desire to maintain balance in my life has been a goal since starting this program. Over the last 4 years, I have addressed this challenge by daily long-distance runs, joining a book club, volunteering, socializing with

friends and travelling. Recently, I joined an academic writing group consisting of doctoral students, which also provides opportunities for social interaction. Such activities alleviate stress, boost morale and often develop into new interests or passions. In addition, sharing my thoughts and feelings with others who have gone through similar experiences has not only been highly reassuring but recorded musings from such exchanges have also become an integral part of my journal where they continue to act as references to coping with challenges.

Section Five: Post-Project Phase AE 520

The Research Project: Professional Challenges and Insights

Conducting this research project in the same institution (the Ontario College of Art & Design) in which I work has had its advantages. Weeks after completing the project, for instance, I was invited to present its results to a group of academic and administrative staff. The ensuing discussion provided many insights, including the notion of teaching English grammar, the focus on which regularly limits the contexts within which vocabulary or language can be applied. This, in turn, limits how language is used for self-expression. Much about language learning involves recognizing the common usage of vocabulary and expressions, not whether they are grammatically correct. Grammar rules are important to learn; equally as important, however, is developing a 'sense' for language as extensions of our physical bodies. Indeed, many language instructors use movement as a way to teach language. Emphasizing this learning approach to augment a more traditional one may lead to a better understanding of how vocabulary, for instance, may be used in different contexts—an important skill to master and one that rule learning alone does not facilitate. Self-Directed Learning accommodates contextual learning,

particularly in language acquisition, which typically does not occur in linear form. In reality, one reviews past information for the purpose of informing and augmenting future learning, the process of which is more akin to a spiral effect. Conveying this to students as a way to obviate feelings of guilt is important, particularly the notion that linguistic mistakes are not always caused by incorrect grammar usage but by the common usage of language, which evolves and is decided on arbitrarily and collectively. One cannot expect oneself, therefore, to master another language if one is not familiar with its evolution and conventions, the achievement of which requires resolve and perseverance.

Providing opportunities for students to cultivate their own individuality within artistic or academic contexts cannot be overemphasized. Rather than focusing on the mere application of a skill, cultivating individuality taps into students' sense of curiosity and delight. A focus on the joy of learning leads to more of the same because the mastery gained from learning in this way tends to be affirming and, therefore, self-motivating. Recognizing the central role they play in their own learning also leads students to own the experience. Equally as important is encouraging students to feel comfortable with learning in a variety of ways including (playful) experimentation; the use of unconventional resources such as the radio, television and other forms of media; and contextual learning. Learning in a variety of ways not only accommodates the ownership of one's learning but also the different ways individuals learn. The challenge then lies not only in finding ways to cultivate students' individualities but also in convincing them of the value and validity learning using a variety of resources and approaches provides. This is important because adult immigrant and international students have a tendency to dismiss learning that embodies anything other than the traditional, instructor-centered approach as not legitimate.

Discussion with colleagues has also revealed how students bring to the classroom a range of

life experiences, skills sets, and knowledge that could be used to inform their learning experience. Allowing students to share their ideas on essay topics, for instance, can augment existing ones and result in highly dynamic class discussions, leading to collaboration, self-reflection and ideas generation. Trusting that students do have a wealth of knowledge and experience on which to draw can mitigate the anxiety that often accompanies the research and writing process because one discovers that process to be a creative task.

Since completing this project, I have learned that one also needs to carefully consider the choice of teaching resources because students can sometimes be unclear about their purpose and usage. Providing students with alternative tools to develop their English vocabulary, for instance, may be challenging because it requires learning meaning contextually rather than through memorization and, therefore, requires a time commitment. This is one factor that taking a Self-Directed Learning approach requires: the recognition that learning on one's own does not result in immediate results; it requires consistent hard work and commitment. Consistent hard work coupled with perseverance is important to maintain because in the process of language acquisition, one can learn a lot very quickly then plateau for an extended period of time. This can be demoralizing for students and can result in a diminishing of effort and even a regression to past learning habits, which, though comforting, are less beneficial in the long run.

During the post-project discussion with colleagues, we discussed how adult immigrants and international students could be participatory in class, yet defining the term "participation", from a Western context, often connotes animated discussions, debates and oral presentations. Adult immigrant and international students, on the other hand, often come from cultures where participation is connoted as the valuing of indirect communication, learning through observation, learning through the past and favouring the collective over the individual (Fox, 1994). For these

students, participation is more broadly defined as attentive listening, completion of assignments, and consistent and punctual attendance (Fritschner, 2000). In North American classrooms, cultural biases towards learning influence how students interact with others in their classes. Ironically, using the seeming disconnect between the ways participation is defined as a springboard to discussing its effects, helps mitigate them and can achieve solidarity in the classroom. For instance, I have become more purposeful in encouraging in-class discussion because of the way it obviates the anxiety caused when students feel expected to produce right or wrong answers, or indeed, to respond at all. Regardless of differences in defining participation, however, all students desire being included in the classroom experience. Engaging in discourse gives students permission to participate in either a passive or active way because the pressure to ‘perform’ is mitigated by the reassurance of being in the presence of others rather than feeling singled out, vulnerable or marginalized.

Confirming My Own Learning.

In the past, I believed I learned when I could recall information I had learned about easily, an act corroborated by my interest in the subject matter. When I am interested in something, it is easier for me to remember details about it. In addition, I felt I had learned when I could understand, relate to and apply newly-acquired knowledge to a variety of contexts.

In more recent times, I have also learned when I am able to answer key questions about that which I am learning, and particularly after having engaged in self-reflection (praxis). This is augmented by discussion about the subject with others. In the case of this research project, I wanted to know whether adult immigrant and international students have ever experienced Self-Directed Learning by asking four specific questions related to this main goal, and to which responses were provided, reviewed and analyzed. I then reflected on the conclusions I formulated

and discussed them with colleagues, the exercise of which prompted the consideration of other viewpoints on the subject matter that I can later reflect on. It is this constant action coupled with reflection that provides many ways to perceive new knowledge. By engaging in these exercises, I believe I am able to confirm that I have learned.

Since starting this program I have realized the value of praxis, the practice of which hones my perception skills, allowing me to notice, analyze and address small learning issues that need improvement. In the past praxis was an exercise that I engaged in unconsciously. More recently, I have been practicing it more purposefully, so it has come to undergird much of my learning, teaching and informs decisions about how to proceed with a variety of tasks.

Discussion is another feature of learning that I now practice more purposefully. I have come to value it for the way it fosters inclusion, which to me, is an important part of the learning process. For years, when I was learning how to sew and working out of my own studio, I often bemoaned working in isolation because despite being grateful for the opportunity to work and create freely, I longed to show and discuss my work with others who had similar interests. Discussion, as an aspect of collaboration seems a natural part of the post-secondary experience, obviating inequalities between instructor (facilitator) and student (learner) and paving the way to natural inquiry.

These approaches and strategies are ones I have used in the past but I did not understand well how they could be used effectively. I initially used them in a remedial context by addressing issues requiring immediate solutions. While applying these approaches on an ad hoc basis may be an effective use for them, I now appreciate knowing the principles and philosophies that undergird them. In so doing, I can be more purposeful about their use and implementation.

Section Six: Summary and Conclusion:

What This All Means

As an adult educator I have discovered that learning unfolds in a very personal way and within the context of an individual's life experience. As members of a classroom, students may be exposed to the same information from the instructor, but this will be filtered, interpreted and responded to in light of students' cultural and educational backgrounds, learning style, personal goals and work ethic.

Since starting this program, I have discovered the merits of Self-Directed Learning, which, as a highly curious and independent learner, resonates with me. Like many of the principles of adult education, it does not advocate learning for its own sake but rather for the purpose of achieving an end. It is, therefore, predicated on an interest in self-improvement whose impetus is self-fulfillment. North American academic conventions have ostensibly evolved to emphasize independent and Self-Directed Learning through the provision of tools and resources students may use to facilitate their own learning.

Self-Directed Learning is an approach that affirms individuals as crucial components of the teaching-learning dynamic. It acknowledges them not only as responsible for their own learning but also as the foundation on which the learning process is based. Since starting this program, I have been more purposeful about cultivating students' moral, emotional and intellectual autonomy; yet, I have also learned to accommodate their ability to self-assess and to choose whether they will learn dependently or independently.

Through research I have confirmed that adult immigrant and international students can adopt a Self-Directed Learning approach through a genuine curiosity in learning a

new skill, the desire to change or improve current life or professional circumstances and attaining a sense of accomplishment. Receptivity to this approach was evident when learning contextually, through practical application, and through a variety of learning tools and resources. As long as instructors are clear about what objectives and purposes these tools serve and monitor how students use them, learning can be achieved.

In many ways, I regard the dynamics of a class engaged in Self-Directed Learning as similar to that of a community: self-initiating people coming together to share ideas in order to contribute to the classroom (micro-community) experience. In light of my research, I would like to create more holistic classroom experiences where sharing real-life experiences is recognized as a crucial aspect of the academic learning experience because it helps students address academic-related issues. Academic writing, the subject I currently teach, entails reflecting on one's real-life experiences to inform and contextualize one's writing, rendering it more tenable and genuine.

Conversely, applying the knowledge students acquire in the classroom into their real-life experiences can only strengthen and provide meaning for the latter. In this way, barriers between informal learning (symbolized by Self-Directed Learning) and formal learning (the post-secondary environment) can finally be eradicated, creating a seamless, fluid crossover of ideas and purposes. This, to me, is learning effectively because it is learning enacted on with intent, genuineness and joy.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1

Learning Contract (Timeline)

This is the contract I created during the orientation sessions of the St. Francis Xavier Master of Adult Education program. The intended tasks, goals and dates reflect my interests and experience at the time of the orientation and provide the opportunity for revision as needed.

LEARNING INTENTS (SKA's) (What I'm going to learn)	LEARNING TASKS, MATERIALS, STRATEGIES (How am I going to learn it)	TARGET DATE	CRITERIA AND MEANS FOR VALIDATING AND DOCUMENTING EVIDENCE (How I'm going to validate/document I've learned it)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To develop and explore approaches to teaching and learning that are humanistic in nature. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage in more readings of the area known as Self-Directed Learning - Implement the knowledge and skills acquired to a class of students in the ESL program - Review the literature outlined in the reading list of this course 	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>November, 2003 – April, 2004</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annotations - Journal entries - Feed back from students - Discussions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To learn how to implement the 'Twelve Principles for Effective Adult Learning' as outlined in the work of Jane Vella 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing lesson plans for an ESL class that incorporate these twelve principles - conduct a professional development session with instructors in the program I teach in on the topic 	<p>January – April 2004</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Journal entries - Videotape - Discussion, feedback from students
LEARNING INTENTS (SKA's) (What I'm going to learn)	LEARNING TASKS, MATERIALS, STRATEGIES (How am I going to learn it)	TARGET DATE	CRITERIA AND MEANS FOR VALIDATING AND DOCUMENTING EVIDENCE (How I'm going to validate/document I've learned it)

APPENDIX 2

The Learning Plan

Personal Narrative

I was born in Iloilo City, Philippines on November 24, 1965. One of the most significant traits of my family was a strong attachment to tradition. This was partially owing to our Roman Catholic background as well as our Filipino heritage. These factors played a significant role in my early upbringing, which affected all aspects of my life. One such aspect was my education. In keeping with family tradition, I was sent to a Roman Catholic private school, Collegio del Sagrado Corazon de Jesus, run by the Sisters of Charity. It was stereotypically Catholic: there was an emphasis on academic excellence, rigour and discipline. Those first few weeks of school were, as a result of being left alone in a roomful of strangers, terrifying primarily because I was a highly emotional and sensitive child, indulged and accustomed to having my own way. I am sure that my teachers were unimpressed. Initially, I came to see them as my enemies: strangers not to be trusted: overly strict and reprimanding. Teachers, however, were well-respected members of the Roman Catholic community I grew up in. Their judgement was irreproachable, their verdict unquestioned. Despite my stubbornness and also out of fear, I too, learned to respect them.

When my family immigrated to Canada in the early seventies and I started elementary school in Winnipeg, a different kind of fear surrounding school ensued. This time it was a fear of the students, not the teachers that I had to contend with. Being a visible minority in a primarily Caucasian environment meant being ostracized, ridiculed and dismissed by the other students. My teachers became my allies, primarily because I was a well-

behaved, hard-working student, solicitous of their knowledge. Hence, I was usually assigned the coveted positions of teacher's marker and lunch purchaser: plum roles that compounded my already flagging reputation with some of the other students.

It was at this point that I thought about the possibility of becoming a teacher, seeing as teachers were seemingly possessed of enviable powers and authority. My elementary school experiences – both in Canada and the Philippines – testified to this notion. All throughout my adolescence, as I my academic life progressed, these early notions of what a teacher's life was like appealed to me. There seemed no question in my mind that this was the profession I would pursue in university. My other interest in fashion design seemed unattainable to me somehow, partially due to the stigma attached to the notion of a boy being interested in a field associated to girls. Education seemed the more practical, potentially lucrative career choice to make.

My first student-teaching experiences confirmed a natural aptitude I had to the profession. I possess a natural empathy to people in general, with a capacity to listen, observe and affirm. For their part, the students responded to me in a way that indicated a natural ability to relate to them in ways that superseded the typical teacher-student roles. Ironically, I never exercised those notions of power or authority I had initially been enamoured of. There did not seem to be a need to do this. Despite this, however, I felt consistently affirmed by the admiration, gratitude and inquisitiveness from my students.

Most of my career has involved teaching English as a Second Language. It was my introduction to this particular field of teaching that my approach began to change. In this role, I have learned to be even more sensitive to the needs of students than when I was teaching in the public school system. English as a Second Language students have the

language and cultural barriers that do not exist for native speakers in the public school system. I have, therefore, learned to consider these factors in planning, evaluating and relating to students in my charge.

Past experiences have taught me invaluable things about teaching in the field of English as a Second Language. Sometimes, these lessons can be difficult ones, such as the notion of keeping promises regarding intended class lessons and activities, which, when foregone on – usually due to a more relaxed attitude towards time management – is regarded as a loss of credibility in many cultures. Similarly, consistency in maintaining equity among students avoiding favouring some over others is another important consideration. Reading about new research into the field as well as attending Teaching as a Second Language (TESL) conferences and participating in professional development sessions for recent innovations in the field also help. During such opportunities, I acquired many new resources, materials and ideas.

Today, the relationships I have with students are what I would deem affable though professional. In the past, I used to cultivate a more casual, sociable and interactive relationship with them – having them for dinner at my home, for instance, or out to a movie. That has changed over the last few years, partially due to the current nature of my job, which does not accommodate regular social activities with students as much as in the past. There is also a lack of inclination on my part to engage in these kinds of social activities. I spend more time away from classes on my personal pursuits, hence, am less likely to interact with students during those times. Recently, I have found it healthy and crucial to spend time away from the educational setting since my intention is to attain a balance between work and a personal life.

From the various contexts outlined, I believe I have come to develop many assets and challenges that may impact on this program. Assets include the many years of experiences in teaching that can act as anecdotal, though realistic, reference points. Self-discipline is another strength that I believe I possess. This is highly evident in my ability to balance my roles of instructor, administrator, clothing designer, and student. Each of these fields embody aspects that have to be independently learned, initiated, cultivated, and completed within a specified time limit. Finally, I have access to resources within the institution I work that could act as a means of support.

There is no doubt that challenges will present themselves along the path to completing this program. These include the time factor. I work full time, in a field whose time parameters are indefinable; one completes one's work when it is done, and not necessarily at a prescribed hour. In addition to full time work, there are other pursuits I am engaged in, which have similar restrictions imposed on them. These may act as obstacles to completing this program. Having maintained this kind of lifestyle in the past, however, I have become accustomed to the pressures it entails, even thrive on them. I have become adept at time management, ensuring that work is prioritized according to schedules and degree of urgency.

Within the field of education I currently find myself in has come much knowledge culled from years of personal and professional experience. In the past, I used to be reluctant to inquire about that which I had no knowledge. For many of those questions, I felt that I should have already known the answer. I have since come to realize that the acquisition of accurate knowledge is more important to me than appeasing egotistical

notions of correct behaviour. Past experiences, both positive and negative, place me in the position of anticipation, ready to rise to the challenges of the work ahead.

Program Goals

In the twelve years that I have been working in the field of literacy and language acquisition, I have become interested in assessing whether learning as a whole may be measured relative to individual instructor style, and how much learning can be attributed to instruction as opposed to a student's autonomous initiative. The question I have now focuses on how much autonomous learning plays in successful learning.

Part of what fulfills me as a teacher is the highly discernible progress that students make from the time they start a course to the time they finish. The distinction between the ranges in vocabulary and sentence structure and usage, particularly in verbal communication, is intriguing to me. How does this happen? Is there a difference, between individuals in the time that it takes for them to learn a new language? Is it simply a matter of motivation? If so, what motivates one to learn? What are the mechanisms that allow one to learn? Does instruction play a great role in whether one learns or not?

Specifically, I would like to focus on the area of Self-Directed Learning, which to me is a more independent, critically-thinking approach to learning as well as to education. It is an interest in discovering approaches or methodologies that encourage students to learn for themselves and to enjoy the learning process. In so being, Self-Directed Learning presumes that learning can be achieved through self-motivation. I am uncertain as to how to assess such an approach since learning something new involves complex interaction of personal and social factors. It is the fascination with how one is

motivated to learn that is my focus in future career development because doing so would attain a level of humanism in teaching that may have been previously lacking.

Research Project: Possibilities

In the last few weeks, I have had the opportunity to read about the area in adult education known as Self-Directed Learning. It is an area that has fascinated me for many years, despite being unaware that such a phenomenon even had a name. Liberation and affirmation are two aspects of learning that I plan to expand on in this program because it is these experiences that conventional education still lacks. I have recently read “Learning to Listen Learning to Teach” by Jane Vella (2002) and it is her designing and implementing teaching methodologies that employ a humanistic approach to learning, in addition to addressing social, political and economic issues, that I am inspired by. Vella’s approach, which has as its foundation, a belief in quantum theory – that is, the belief in the universal synergy that interconnects all – assesses the learning involved from a specific context. The approach she takes is compassionate as well as effective. I would like to be able to implement a similar approach to the classes I currently teach, as well as to future prospects of working for humanitarian organizations. Other examples of literature include the works of Paulo Freire, specifically his book entitled “Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (1972), and the seminal work of Malcolm Knowles and Alan Tough. There is much for me learn at this stage and I am certain of the existence of other inspiring writers on the subject. For now, I am tentatively focused in this area of adult education.

At no time has the notion of Self-Directed Learning been more significant to me than today. I have been teaching in the field of ESL for over 12 years and as a result,

have been fascinated with the myriad ways that adults learn. Unlike the kind of learning I was subjected to in my early academic life, the field of ESL is more accommodating of a self-directed approach to learning in contrast to other fields that adhere to more conventional forms of education. For example, the ESL program I teach in – a non-credited program through a continuing education division of a liberal arts university – acts as a conduit to regular university classes. In choosing this option, learners are engaged in linguistic skills that can familiarize them with North American university life: essay writing, reading, discussion groups, oral presentations, and note taking. Lessons often utilize multi-media presentations – video, audio, newspapers, guest lecturers – that not only develop listening and note-taking skills, but also provoke thought and incite responses. Such exercises can be intimidating to the learners in my program because they are not accustomed to a student-centred approach in teaching. Such exercises, however, can be liberating and affirming of these same learners. It is these latter experiences that I want to expose learners to more of. It is these that I want to learn more about.

APPENDIX 3

Philosophy of Adult Education Inventory

Thank you for completing the on-line PAEI... Your scores have been submitted...

WHAT YOUR SCORE MEANS: Each of your scores reflects a particular philosophy of adult education: Liberal, Humanistic, Behaviorist, Radical, or Progressive Adult Education. Your highest score reflects the philosophy that is closest to your own beliefs; your lowest score reflects a philosophy that is least like yours. For example, a score of 95-105 indicates a strong agreement with a given philosophy; a score of 15-25 indicates a strong disagreement with a given philosophy. If your score is between 55 and 65, it probably means that you neither agree nor disagree with a particular philosophy. Note that there is no "right" or "wrong" philosophy. The Inventory is designed only to give you information about your own beliefs; not to make judgments about those beliefs.

You may want to give some thought to how your beliefs influence your actions as an adult educator.

PAEI Scores:

Liberal: 68
Behaviorist: 80
Progressive: 80
Humanist: 93
Radical: 79

APPENDIX 5

This document, intended for tutors to record information during one-on-one consultations with E.S.L. students at the beginning of an academic term, is intended to identify student needs and develop strategies and resources students may use to facilitate learning. Such a document considers differences between North American learning conventions and those of other countries. Easily adapted, this document may also be used with students with learning disabilities. It was created during my stint as writing tutor at the Ontario College of Art & Design.

Study Plan For English Language Skills

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____

Student #: _____ Phone #: _____ E-mail: _____

Purpose of Visit: _____

Date of Visit: _____ Advisor: _____

Understanding key points in lectures:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

resources: _____

Keeping up with course readings:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

resources: _____

Informal conversation skills and oral comprehension:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

resources: _____

Learning traditions for academic writing in North America:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

resources: _____

Increasing academic vocabulary:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

resources: _____

Adapted by Tom Robles, Teaching Assistant, Writing & Learning Centre, Ontario College of Art & Design.

APPENDIX 6

This critical analysis unit may be used with first year university students in a variety of courses. Its purpose is to introduce students to critical thinking and writing skills. These lessons encourage students to develop self-editing and self-correcting skills and starts with a brief overview of English grammar in the context of sentence construction. For this unit, instructors are intended to play a facilitative role.

Unit 1 - Critical Analysis

Introduction:

Analysis can be used to strengthen skills in reading, listening, and writing through the practice of critical thinking; however, critical thinking may be too abstract a concept to teach unless it is contextualized. The Arts, therefore, may act as a context through which critical thinking may be introduced to students. This unit presents lessons that introduce students to critical writing about ideas, images, and objects. It is one that can be applied to any medium in the Arts be it music, dance, drama, film, or the visual arts and begins at the sentential level. Teachers may follow these lessons sequentially or arbitrarily in order to best introduce or supplement critical thinking and writing skills. Lessons include introductory information and one exercise/activity. Teachers may supplement or alter these as needed.

Lesson 1 – Crafting Clear Sentences:

What is a Sentence?

- A sentence is a group of words that must contain two parts:
 1. Subject
 2. Verb
- A sentence must express a comprehensible idea or thought.
- A sentence is not a matter of length.
- Two words can be a complete sentence.
- A dozen words might not be a complete sentence.

What is a Fragment?

- A fragment is a group of words in which either the subject or verb is missing. As a result, the group of words is incomprehensible
- Fragment: went to class.
- Sentence: Lisa installs her exhibit
- Fragment: Lisa her exhibit.
- Sentence: Before using the digital camera, take the cap off.
- Fragment: Before using the digital camera

What are run-on sentences?

- Sometimes a writer expresses two complete thoughts as one sentence. When the writer does not separate the two complete thoughts with punctuation, the result is a run-on

- sentence. Run-on sentences are confusing because the reader does not know where one complete thought ends and the second complete thought begins.
- Run-on: Asheka is painting a portrait of a young student is a challenging act.
 - Edited: Asheka is painting a portrait of a young student. Painting a portrait is a challenging job.
- A run on sentence also occurs when a writer incorrectly uses a comma to join two complete thoughts. When two complete thoughts are joined with one comma and no connecting word (ie: ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘or’), a comma splice occurs.
- Run-on: Mrs. Vassel is an artist, she studied at OCAD.
 - Edited: Mrs. Vassel is an artist. She studied at OCAD.
- A run-on sentence can be corrected by:
 1. adding a comma and then a connecting word (ie: *and, but, or, nor, yet*) after the first group of a comprehensible thought or idea of a run-on sentence.
 - Run on: Diane does the cooking Karen washes the dishes.
 - Edited: Diane does the cooking, and Karen washes the dishes.
 - Run on: Michelle likes swimming she prefers tennis.
 - Edited: Michelle likes swimming, but she prefers tennis.
 2. by using a semicolon after the first comprehensible thought if the two comprehensible thoughts are closely related.
 - Run on: Dark colour can make a room appear smaller light colour can make a room appear larger.
 - Edited: Dark colour can make a room appear smaller; light colour can make a room appear larger.
 3. by using a semicolon with a special kind of connecting word.
 - Run-on: Sun Tan lotion helps a person tan gradually sunscreen blocks the sun’s rays and prevents sunburn.
 - Edited: Suntan lotion helps a person tan gradually; however, sunscreen blocks the sun’s rays and prevents sunburn.
- Provided below is a list of other connecting words that are often used with semicolons in front of them and a comma after them.
 - Words that add on a related sentence: *furthermore, also, moreover, besides, in addition, for instance, for example, in fact, like.*
- Run-on: I don’t like big cars, **besides**, they cost too much.
 - Edited: I don’t like big cars; **besides** they cost too much.
- Connecting words that add an opposing or opposite side: *however, on the contrary, nevertheless, on the other hand.*
- Run-on: Lyn enjoys her new job however she wants to go back to school.
 - Edited: Lyn enjoys her new job; however, she wants to go back to school.

Summary:

- A sentence must express a comprehensible idea or thought.
- In order to correct a fragment and express a comprehensible thought, a group of words needs a subject **and** a verb.

- A run-on sentence may be corrected by:
 - a. using punctuation correctly.
 - b. using the appropriate connecting word.

Exercise: Each of the following sentences has an error. Identify the error according to the information above and correctly re-write each sentence (note: there may be more than one way to correct a sentence).

1. Henry his digital camera to Sam.

Error: _____

Edited: _____

2. Sam lent his acrylic paints to Sue gave them to her classmate Ji Heun, Sam didn't appreciate this.

Error: _____

Edited: _____

3. Movies are some of my favourite forms of self-expression, they can evoke such powerful emotions.

Error: _____

Edited: _____

4. But he always dances well.

Error: _____

Edited: _____

5. Sasha stretched the canvas over the frame the canvas was too small.

Error: _____

Edited: _____

6. The films of Robert Altman defy the conventions of film making. They can be described as being irreverent, witty, political, satirical, and entertaining, the subject matter they focus on ranges from fashion, to politics to the class system.

Error: _____

Edited: _____

7. I don't want to spend the money on a new film-editing software package, but, it would be nice to receive one for my birthday.

Error: _____

Edited: _____

8. The publisher sent Marilyn's manuscript back to her with some useful advice. However, Marilyn didn't have enough time to read all of them.

Error: _____

Edited: _____

9. Writing can be wonderfully liberating: it can also be demoralising.

Error: _____

Edited: _____

10. Can you buy me a few supplies at the art store which I will need for my sculpture and I will need to send to my brother for his birthday?

Error: _____

Edited: _____

Lesson 2 – Analytical Writing:

Analytical writing combines description with inference or evaluation. Description involves describing what we see with our eyes whereas inference or evaluation involves interpreting reality based on evidence and combining that with our own (subjective) perspective. Generally, analysis consists of the following formula:

DESCRIPTION (desc.) + INFERENCE/EVALUATION (inf./eval.) = ANALYSIS

When we combine description with inference/evaluation, we analyze something from the context of our own life experience – how that object makes us feel or whether we can relate to it on an intellectual, emotional, or spiritual level. Consider the following examples:

1. Tom is wearing a wet, black raincoat and carrying a wet umbrella. (this is a descriptive statement of what we see).
2. Tom is wearing a wet, black raincoat and carrying a wet umbrella; it must be raining heavily. (this is an analytical statement combining a description of what is seen as well as an inference).

Seen in another way, we can say that a description focuses on the effect (the surface value of an object or image: in sentence #1, it is Tom wearing a wet, black raincoat and carrying an umbrella). In analytical writing, however, there is an attempt to connect the effect with its cause. In sentence #2, the cause is shown to be the rain, which causes Tom and his umbrella to be wet. This cause may be inferred (a subjective interpretation or judgment) based on the evidence (in sentence #2, this includes the wet raincoat and wet umbrella).

Exercise 1: Provide students with the list of objects and writings for which they must write an analytical sentence. Teachers are encouraged to also provide their own lists as needed:

- A poem
 - A photograph
 - A short story
 - A film
 - A painting
 - A sculpture
1. Assess or evaluate the analytical sentences collectively as a whole class (if students number less than ten) or in small groups.
 2. Encourage students to critique each other's writings with respect, sensitivity, and in light of the above criteria, not personal taste.
 3. Use the above criteria as starting points for discussion.
 4. Encourage students to gradually look below the surface image of these objects/ideas and on to hidden meaning from which they can make inferences.

Sample Analytical Paragraph:

The following paragraph is an example of an analytical paragraph. It presents an argument and tries to convince the reader of how this argument is valid by providing supporting evidence. The argument means the same as inference, cause, and reason. The evidence is the description, which means the same as the effect, result or outcome.

Exercise 2: Provide students with a copy of the paragraph below. Teachers may also provide their own as needed. Encourage students to identify the meaning of new vocabulary contextually rather than using a dictionary. Emphasise the distinction between the description and the inference, which together make up an analysis.

1. Please read the paragraph and see if you can identify the argument (inference/cause) and its supporting evidence (effect/result/outcome).

In Sylvan Barnet's "A Short Guide to Writing About Art", John F.A. Taylor believes that the focus of the interior of the cathedral is very limited. It is concentrated primarily on the altar table. For instance, the first thing that the viewer notices is the glowing light

coming from the lancets in the apse where the altar table stands. The consistent pattern and placement of the arches of the nave moves toward it; the mouldings come together with precision on it. Overhead, the highest point of the apse extends out from it; the rib shafts which carry it all the way to the floor of the nave force the eye to look at it. The altar is the only part of the Gothic cathedral, which is highly defined. In other places there is always an indefinable area, which is left unknown. Here, in the cathedral, there isn't. The altar table is ultimately the point at which all of the cathedral's design elements and focus end (103).

New vocabulary: cathedral, lancet, apse, nave, mouldings, ribshaft, Gothic

a. The argument (inference) presented in this paragraph is about:

b. List some of the evidence (description) presented in this paragraph:

Write your own analytical paragraph by choosing one of the following objects or ideas:

1. a painting
2. a photograph
3. a piece of industrial design
4. a piece of fashion design
5. nature

Lesson 3 – Critical Thinking:

The following is a list of questions that introduces the practice of critical thinking. Students may consider these questions when they must write a critical review or summary of an article, a film, a book, or an art piece.

1. What is the artist's basic position?
 - Is the artist inclined to hold a view regardless of evidence opposing that view? In other words, is the artist's stance somewhat prejudiced?
 - Does the artist admit any prejudices or limitations in the work, or are they left unexamined? Often the artist will address their own limitations, only to dismiss them as unimportant. Are they?
 - Is the artist's viewpoint consistent? If it isn't, has she acknowledged this inconsistency in her work?
2. How does the artist deal with opposing viewpoints?
 - Does the artist even mention opposing views (this could be a weakness in itself). If so, what views does the artist oppose? How?

- Are these opposing views granted any validity? Does the artist report these views accurately and fairly? Does she explain why these views are inadequate or weak. Does she explain why one viewpoint is more appropriate than another?

3. How does the artist appeal to her audience? How does she use reason?

- Does the artist rely on logic, or emotion or is it an ethical appeal? Is this form of appeal appropriate, given the subject matter? Does it work? For example, if a artist wants to appear knowledgeable, trustworthy, kind, generous, etc, she will usually present herself as that kind of person. This is an ethical appeal. If her motive is primarily to move her audience, she will appeal to them emotionally, by evoking fear, compassion, love, sorrow, etc. If she is trying to appeal to the audience's sense of reason or logic, she will use statistics, other documented sources, and authority to back her up.
- Is the argument cohesive and coherent?
- Are the connections logical and clear?
- Is the logic derived from verifiable evidence? Are they academic or scholarly sources? Is this important?

4. What sources does the artist use?

- Are the sources outdated or irrelevant?
- Are they presented accurately?
- Is the argument based on accurate information?

5. Does the structure or style (of the film, book, article, or painting) reflect the content?

- Whether you're reviewing a book or an article, you might consider whether it is structurally coherent and organized. Are the chapters or subsections in the appropriate order. If there is a visual component, are the images easily accessible? Are they appropriate images? Do the images enhance the text?
- Does the artist use an appropriate voice? Is it ironic, solemn, academic, tongue-in-cheek?

6. How does the artist conclude the argument?

- If the argument being made is a valid one, has the artist taken into account its future implications?
- If the research or ideas being explored are inconclusive, has the artist taken this into account?
- What still remains to be explained? How could further research enhance the study?
- Has the artist presented any explanations or solutions? Are they appropriate?

(adapted from "Developing a Critical Stance" from <http://www.eciad.ca/wc/critical.htm>)

Exercise: Provide students with the list of objects and writings for which they must write a critical summary. This may be as short as one paragraph or as long as a two-page essay. Teachers may also provide their own lists as needed:

- A poem
- A photograph
- A short story

- A film
 - A painting
 - A sculpture
1. Assess or evaluate the critical writing collectively as a whole class (if students number less than ten) or in small groups.
 2. Encourage students to critique each other's writings with respect, sensitivity, and in light of the above criteria, not personal taste.
 3. Use the above criteria as starting points for discussion.
 4. Encourage students to gradually look below the surface image of these objects/ideas and on to hidden meaning and emotions or memories that these objects evoke.

Lesson 4 – Applying Critical Thinking, Writing, and Analysis to the Medium of Film:

By providing students with a background on critical thinking, writing, and analysis, it is now possible to apply these skills to the films students will view. Prior to viewing, teachers are advised to review synopses of films in order to identify common themes or subject matter. These will provide the context on which a teacher may choose to focus. Here are sample activities a teacher may engage students in. These may be used as either pre- or post-screening activities. This lesson was specifically created for students participating in the Youth Programme series of the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival:

Themes for Discussion:

Common themes all films in the Youth Programme share include:

1. Parent-child dynamics
2. Identity
3. Notions of belonging
4. Perception
5. Overcoming obstacles
6. Biography

Exercise 1: As a pre- or post-screening activity, teachers may use comparison/contrast of personal/individual experiences to initiate discussion. Teachers may provide students with the list of questions below to reflect on or create their own relative to themes or topics currently being studied in class. Teachers may then engage students in a class discussion on some of these questions.

1. How does your life experience within the context of the aforementioned themes compare? How do they contrast?
2. Do these similarities and differences cross cultural/linguistic lines? If so, what makes these similarities universal? If not, what makes them unique to one's culture?
3. What are some common techniques that film uses to evoke the aforementioned themes?
4. Do you believe film is a medium that can successfully provoke thought or affect point-of-view? If so, how does it do this? Refer to one specific film that you saw today that achieved this. Refer to another film that wasn't as successful at achieving this.

Exercise 2: As a critical writing activity, teachers may then ask students to choose a short film to do a critical summary of using the processes outlined in the previous lessons.

Teachers may introduce such activities gradually. For instance, instead of initially assigning students to write a full essay, begin with having students write analytical sentences and building on these. After each writing activity:

- Assess or evaluate the critical writing collectively as a whole class (if students number less than ten) or in small groups.
- Encourage students to critique each other's writings with respect, sensitivity, and in light of the above criteria, not personal taste.
- Use the above criteria as starting points for discussion.
- Encourage students to gradually look below the surface image of these films' stories and on to hidden meaning and emotions or memories that these evoke.

Created by Tom Robles, ESL Instructor/Curriculum Developer, Ontario College of Art and Design and Crown Language Institute, Toronto, Ontario.

Unit 2 - The Writing Process

Generating Ideas

Spend some time listing as many ideas for your essay as possible whether or not they are related to each other. You can always edit this list later. When thinking about your ideas, you may want to ask yourself:

- What do I know about my topic?
- What is my purpose for writing?
- Who are my readers and how much do they know about my topic?
- How is this essay like others I have written before?
- What structure will work best for my topic?

Ideas/Topics I am Interested In:

Creating An Outline I

From the list of ideas above, choose a topic and begin to create a structure for your essay by organizing and ordering your list based on ideas related to it that make sense to you. This structure should follow some kind of sequence. This sequence can be based on the same questions you asked yourself before:

- What do I know about my topic?
- What is my purpose for writing?
- Who are my readers and how much do they know about my topic?
- How is this essay like others I have written before?
- What structure will work best for my topic?

Note: You are not writing the essay at this stage yet. You are simply writing notes and organizing the ideas or information you have collected for the topic you have chosen. Feel free to re-organize and re-order these ideas as needed.

Idea One:

Sub-Ideas:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Idea Two:

Sub-Ideas:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Idea Three:

Sub-Ideas:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Idea Four: _____

Sub-Ideas:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Idea Five: _____

Sub-Ideas:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Idea Six: _____

Sub-Ideas:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Creating An Outline II

Next, organize the ideas and sub-ideas for your chosen topic into notes for an essay. You do not have to organize the notes in the order they appear on this handout. Organize ideas and information into sections as they come up in your mind. When you are doing this, keep in mind the same questions as before:

- What do I know about my topic?
- What is my purpose for writing?
- Who are my readers and how much do they know about my topic?
- How is this essay like others I have written before?

- What structure will work best for my topic?

Note: Again, you are not writing the essay itself yet, just organizing information into the sections you feel they belong to. Also, you may find it easier to complete this section after you have gathered and read a variety of sources about your topic.

Introductory Paragraph(s):

Main Body Paragraphs:

Paragraph One:

Paragraph Two:

Paragraph Three:

Paragraph Four:

Paragraph Five:

Concluding Paragraph(s):

Paragraph One:

Paragraph Two:

Writing the Essay: The First Draft

At this stage, start writing the essay for your topic. Initially, your intention is out of focus. The purpose of this early writing is to find a strategy that will allow you to write a rough draft that will closely match the ideal. In the drafting episode, you're doing some writing, maybe lots of it, as you attempt to express your ideas on the page. Again, you do not have to write this draft in the order it appears on this handout. Organize ideas and information into sections as they come up in your mind, but continue asking yourself the same questions as before:

- What do I know about my topic?
- What is my purpose for writing?
- Who are my intended readers and how much do they know about my topic?
- How is the task like other I have had before?
- What structure will work best for my topic?

Strategies you might use:

- Any or all of those you used for generating ideas
- Revising your outline: this can be useful when you have lots to say but aren't clear about how you'll present that material
- Remember that outlines need to be flexible, not restrictive.
- Create a visual representation of your topic instead of a written one: use a sketch pad, black/white boards, note cards, etc.)

Multiple Drafts: Revising

As you continue writing, you are becoming more satisfied with how your essay is progressing but feel that changes are still needed. Revising requires making major changes (for example: when you realize that 'real' start of the essay is on page 3 not on the first two pages; you realize that you've been repeating yourself on pages 2 and 4 and that it's possible to group these parts together). At this stage you can have as many as two, three, or four drafts before you write your final draft.

Continue asking yourself the same questions as before:

- What do I know about my topic?
- What is my purpose for writing?
- Who are my intended readers and how much do they know about my topic?
- How is this task like others I have had before?

- What structure will work best for my topic?

Strategies you might use when revising:

- Any/all of those you used for generating ideas and drafting
- Ask for feedback: this is valuable.
- Review your drafts: writing in the margins a brief description of each paragraph's content allows you to detect whether you're repeating yourself. If descriptions are difficult to write, this could mean that your paragraph is unfocused or consists of too many topics.

The Final Draft: Editing/Proofreading

The final draft of an essay is the one that you are completely satisfied with because it answers all of the questions you have been asking from the beginning:

- My essay answers or addresses my assignment question
- My essay is clear about its topic
- My essay is clear about its purpose for being written
- My essay is clear about who my readers are and provides them with the right amount of information about my topic
- My essay is similar to past essays I have written and have been satisfied with
- My essay is structured in the best way for my topic

Clarifying the point of your essay (minor revision, focusing on grammar, punctuation, and spelling) is what editing is about. At this stage, you are not making major changes to your essay, only minor ones. Perhaps the best approach would be to edit several times with a different focus each time (for example: read the text once just looking for spelling mistakes; then read the text looking only to shorten sentences and paragraphs, cutting out excess words).

Read drafts aloud, even to yourself. This forces you to hear the language, as well as to see the errors that you may have overlooked. In editing and proofreading, it's important to create distance between yourself and your text or, more accurately, between what you've said and how you've said it. This difference is why student writers save editing and proofreading until the very end of the writing process.

Remember, good writing doesn't happen overnight! It takes time, patience, making mistakes, and learning from them. Perseverance is key!

Adapted by Tom Robles, Teaching Assistant, Ontario College of Art & Design from: Allyn and Bacon Guide to Peer Tutoring by Paula Gillespie and Neal Lerner Copyright 2000, Longman, New York.

APPENDIX 7

This template was created for those wanting to acquire new English vocabulary. It is intended to be used as an alternative to the traditional approach of looking up new words in a dictionary and memorizing their meaning. By defining new vocabulary in their own words, students will more likely retain the new knowledge.

Personal Dictionary

The personal dictionary is one of the best ways to acquire and increase your vocabulary. When you discover a new term or phrase, write it down in the table below. Ask anyone who might know what it means and write it down in your own words. Then, write down the context or circumstances in which you learned this word. Practice using this new word in similar contexts. Doing so will help you truly learn it. As you fill up this table, notice how the terms you collect and learn are a reflection of your experiences as an individual.

<u>Term</u>	<u>My Definition</u>	<u>Context/Circumstance in which I learned this word</u>

Created by Tom Robles, Curriculum Developer and Head Instructor, Crown Language Institute, Toronto, Ontario.

APPENDIX 8

This handout is intended to help instructors reflect on how they evaluate students for the purpose of creating an evaluation or assessment tool. As these vary according to purpose, needs assessment and evaluation forms will also vary in format. This model reflects my purposes for the courses I teach.

Evaluating Students

What are my current perceptions of evaluating students?

- By using evaluation for the purpose of confirming knowledge acquisition while students are in the course.
- By using evaluation to inform the design of a new course and to make changes according to this evaluation
- By using evaluation as a tool for affirming student progress

How do I do evaluating in my own work?

- Using standardized tests that produce quantifiable results, which students can then use to compare their work
- Assigning homework that will later be submitted and assessed; this assessment is subjective because there is no standard criteria used to evaluate this work

How does your planning relate to the evaluation process?

- Depending on the course, some plans teach directly to the test
- In a more general ESL course, there isn't an evaluation process because of students' perceptions and fears of what this entails; the focus of then becomes the course's contents and results in a less formal, less structured course

How do you discover learning needs?

- By conducting a needs assessment survey at the beginning of a course, which is supplemented with on-going dialogue with students as the course proceeds.
- Dialogue with students can help inform teaching practice
- Observing students' response to questions posed in class can reveal such things as whether students fully comprehend the questions or their implications
- Observing students' in-class conduct, behaviour, and rate of attendance also provides insights to their potential needs

What have you learned about yourself as an educator?

- That my focus tends to be in-class interactions between me and students but not on how assessing the quality of that relationship
- That I need a more structured, quantitative, and accountable way to evaluate students that focuses on their individual needs, not on their needs as a group
- That the needs assessments surveys I'd created in the past are too general and don't really relate the course objectives with their purported outcomes, or if they do, there isn't a cogent way of ascertaining these

What do you hope to learn as you examine the accountability process and apply it to your teaching situation?

- To become more accountable to and prescriptive for my students as individuals
- To ascertain for myself that students are making progress and are learning
- That students are able to fully apply what they are learning in the courses I teach them
- To learn how to design effective evaluation surveys

If you currently view evaluation as an important part of each program for which you are responsible, how does that show in the process as you evaluate?

- Through eliciting verbal feedback from students as the course progresses, which is then used to adjust or inform the course and resource materials
- Through engaging in discussions with other colleagues about their classroom experiences and how these affect my attitudes towards how my students are learning

What key elements of a philosophy of evaluation that guide your efforts can you articulate?

- That evaluation should be used to ensure that students are learning what was intended for them to learn
- That evaluation can be used to ensure that what is being learned is applicable and not just exist in the realm of theory
- That evaluation can be used as a tool of affirmation for both instructors and students, which can then be used to propel them forward beyond current and self-imposed boundaries of learning

As a practicing adult educator, when do you feel that you have the autonomy to design evaluation in such a way that it helps you improve the education process as well as the results of the program?

- When colleagues and administrators of educational programs I work in sanction such an effort
- When I work independent of such programs, for instance, when I tutor individual students
- When a course I teach is less 'high stakes', less structured, and so is weighted less in percentage than another in the same program

Make a list of the strongly-held beliefs that currently guide your approach to evaluation, what would it include?

- Evaluations must be carefully and purposefully created to reflect the goals and objectives of a program
- Evaluation tools should reflect an evaluation philosophy, a program design, the time and resources of an organization, and the skills/interests of the educators and learners
- Evaluations shouldn't limit or interfere with a program

Textbook

2: _____

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

poor

satisfactory

excellent

6. How successful was your instructor in creating an environment that made learning possible?

Textbook 1: _____

1-----2-----3-----4-----5

unsuccessful

satisfactory

very successful

7. Was the amount of homework:

too easy,

at the right level,

too difficult?

8. What specific activities/exercises have you found most helpful to improve your skills?

9. Do you have any other comments about this course?

Thank you for completing this evaluation form!