WHAT HAS HELPED AND HINDERED THE EXPERIENCE OF ADULT MALES

WHO RETURNED TO SCHOOL

by

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Abstract

How adult males experience returning to school is rarely documented. The present study explored what helped and hindered adult males in their experience as they returned to school via the adult education system and addressed the following question: "What has helped and hindered the experience of adult males who returned to school?" Twelve males, 19 to 49 years of age in British Columbia, Canada who attended the adult education system operated by the Vancouver School Board, were interviewed using the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) (Butterfield et al., 2009). The qualitative analysis of the interviews identified 346 critical incidents and formed eleven helping categories and seven hindering categories for adult males who returned to school. The eleven helping categories included: (1) Teacher Encouragement, Support and Acceptance, (2) Course Schedule, Timetable and Flexibility, (3) Goals, Motivation and Expectations, (4) Acceptance and Belonging, (5) Stability and Support Systems, (6) Autonomy, (7) Teacher Curriculum Presentation and Delivery (8) Personal Growth, Maturity and Self Awareness, (9) Free or Low Cost, (10) Facilities, Location and Classroom Environment and (11) Computer Literacy and Technology. The seven hindering categories were: (1) Education System Based Instability, (2) Health, Emotional Struggles, Rejection and Judgement, (3) Financial, Work and Family Responsibilities, (4) Academic Struggles, Course Design and Delivery, (5) Immigration, Literacy and Cultural Barriers, (6) Lack of Goals, Motivation and Expectations and (7) Facilities, Classroom and Supplies. The results from this study are discussed in relation to implications for theory, practice and future research.

Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, S. Derganc. The fieldwork reported in Chapters 2-4 was covered by UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board, certificate number H14-01436.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

In 2010/2011, according to Statistics Canada (2012), 190,800 students dropped out of high school. The research literature clearly shows those without a high school diploma tend to have lower wages, difficulty securing a well-paying job and tend to be more vulnerable to economic downturns (Ferrer and Riddell, 2002). Students who drop out of high school have higher rates of unemployment (Bushnik, Barr-Telford and Bussiere 2004), drug use and social service involvement compared to those who graduate (Woods, 1995). Social and economic costs are also important. A study in 1989 by the Conference Board of Canada (Lafleur, 1992) estimated the 140,000 annual dropouts cost nearly $4 billion over their working lifetime. Ferguson (2005) stresses it is essential stakeholders and decision makers recognize the key to economic development and a civil society is education.

A factor associated with dropping out is gender. The majority of dropouts in 2010/11, were young men (117,600) compared to young women (73,200) (Statistics Canada, 2012). In addition to dropping out more, males are consistently less likely to return to school than females (Gilmour, 2010). A pattern in the literature reveals males are more likely to drop out of school and are also less likely than females to enrol in the second chance system (Looker & Thiessen, 2008). The second chance system includes public and private schools, alternative learning centres, community based non-profit programs, community college and the adult education system (Martin and Halperin, 2006).

Dropping out is a process rather than an event, where multiple factors lead to student disengagement. Both genders report school related problems, but males tend to experience more

behavioural issues compared to females, and list wanting to work as factors in leaving school early. Females tend to leave school early for personal or health reasons such as pregnancy (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002; Robertson, 2007).

High school graduates tend to be advantaged compared to dropouts, however it is imperative to note that the social cost of dropping out a second time is as significant as the first. Those who are successful in the second chance system tend to be almost as equally advantaged as those who never dropped out (Looker & Thiessen, 2008). Therefore, the second chance system allows dropout returnees a pathway to better jobs, higher wages, lower unemployment and increased job satisfaction (Gilmore, 2010).

Unfortunately, many second chance system students are not successful and drop out again, at a substantial cost to the individual and society with little information as to why this is. There is a gap in the research and how returnees experience the second chance system needs further study.

Looker and Thiessen (2008) highlight that there is limited research on second chance youth compared to those who initially drop out of the high school system. Their analyses illustrate further research is needed to identify the underlying dynamics of the factors associated with returning to the second chance school system. In addition, they question the underlying reasons why First Nations youth, immigrants and members of visible minority groups are more likely to enter the second chance school system and why males are more likely to drop out.

In addition to the lack of research on male second chance students, men are vastly underrepresented in published psychotherapy articles. A content analysis of 234 articles from years 2000 to 2011 of the Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy revealed that out of the 40 gender specific articles identified, the vast majority, thirty-seven, studied females. Only

three articles, a 1 in 12 ratio studied men, highlighting a stark absence of research targeting boys or men (Hoover, Bedi & Beall, 2012). As a result, there is relatively little knowledge on the characteristics, processes, and outcomes of Canadian males in counselling which indicates a need for further research on how best to provide males with counselling and psychotherapy support (Hoover et al., 2012).

In addition to the limited research on why second chance students return to school, there is even less research on what factors affect second chance students *after* they do return. Little is known about what makes them want to stay and want to leave. To help shed light on this gap in the literature, the research question asks: What Has Helped and Hindered the Experience of Adult Males Who Returned to School? From the perspective of male participants, the research seeks to find out what factors aid and impede adult male students *after* they return to school.

Returning to school is a period of transition. As someone who has worked directly in education for over twelve years in alternative and corrections school programs, adult education and crisis centres for youth, I am interested in the male's experience after they have returned to school as an adult attempting to better their lives via the second chance system. I have ideas which may help answer this question from an alternative and adult educator's perspective which I will speak more about in the methods chapter of the study.

Rationale for Study

Early school leavers or dropouts are prevalent across North America and Canada. In Canada, 117,600 males dropped out compared to 73, 200 females in 2010/11 (Statistics Canada, 2012), which suggests gender as a factor. Raymond (2008) reports that gender differences tend to be noted but the underlying causes are rarely explored. As a result, it is still unclear why males are more likely to drop out of school, and are less likely to enrol in second

chance system than females (Looker & Thiessen, 2008). The British Columbia Ministry of Education reports there were 23,509 students taking adult education courses in 2011/12 (British Columbia Teacher's Federation, 2012, p. 17). Unfortunately, little is known what factors help or hinder adult males when they enrol back in education as an adult.

The disengagement process for high school students can be complex and include both individual and inter-relational factors; therefore there is no best practice model to follow. It is unknown what motivates returnees, what engages them or what factors lead to disengagement (Robertson, 2007). There is even less research on the second chance system and adult students. It is unclear if or how the factors involved with the disengagement process of second chance system students relate to those of high school dropouts.

These second chance students who return to school as adults may bring with them valuable life or work experiences and transferrable skills, along with family and financial responsibilities. This transition back to school may involve leaving the working force, unemployment, or the social assistance system. Therefore, some important questions arise: How do they experience the transition back to school and what makes them want to stay and want to leave?

As highlighted, there is limited research on second chance students even though it is shown those who are successful in the second chance system and graduate will realize the same benefits of those who never dropped out (Looker & Thiessen, 2008). There is a need to generate more information regarding males who return to school, specifically, what has helped adult males have a successful transition back to school. Hearing from the adult males themselves regarding their experiences is significant as their experiences are authentic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose for the study is to better understand, through the experience of the participants, what helped and what hindered after they returned to school via the second chance system.

The research question to be addressed is: What Has Helped and Hindered the Experience of Adult Males Who Returned to School? The returnees have identified factors critical in their experience of the adult education system. Returnees, aged 19-49 years of age were interviewed using the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) (Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio & Amundson, 2009). Using ECIT, a list of categories emerged which identified what helped and what hindered the student returnees while returning to school as an adult. This is a qualitative research method and, as outlined by Butterfield et al. (2009) a total of nine credibility checks will be used to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

These interviews illustrate the experience of male returnees and provide information to educators, service providers, policy makers and government systems who work with at risk students, dropouts and returnees through the second chance systems of adult education, college upgrading and post-secondary education (PSE). The information generated can inform the practice of counselling adult male students who experience the transition of returning to school via the second chance system.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Returning to school can be a difficult experience, especially if the first time around was unsuccessful. Leaving a familiar world behind and beginning a new one as a second chance student can be a challenging transition. The literature shows several themes which are prevalent regarding males who return to school: (1) life as a disengaged student, (2) life as a dropout, (3) life as a second chance system student, and (4) interventions.

Life as a Disengaged Student

Little is known about the disengagement and dropout process for adult males, therefore the disengagement process of high school students is reviewed. Dropping out is a process rather than an event (Robertson, 2007; Bowlby & McMullen, 2002). Student attitudes and behaviours are involved in the process (Chuang 1997; Gingras, Bowlby, & Pilon 2001; HRDC 2000a) and dropouts tend to be more disengaged and have more negative attitudes towards school (Looker & Thiessen, 2008).

Ferguson (2005) describes the disengagement process as a complex, often emotional, decision to leave school on the part of the student and/or disconnection by the school system. This process is often a non-linear pathway toward adult status; is inter-relational rather than individual, contingent on promises (kept or broken) between people, and is multi-dimensional across micro, meso and macro levels (p.20).

A Statistics Canada (2005) study examined 15 year olds over a two year period, which revealed both males and females who dropped out were most likely to cite school-related problems, including boredom, lack of interest, problems with schoolwork and teachers, being expelled, and feelings of 'why bother' as the main reason they left. However, 56% of all dropouts blamed problems that fell under three other broad categories: personal, work-related, or

other. The role of non-school factors for dropping out could be much more prevalent than reported, as it may be easier to blame school rather than private and personal issues (Robertson, 2007).

Five identified areas which lead to student disengagement and dropping out were: (Robertson, 2007): 1) Family orientation, 2) Academic achievement, 3) Motivation, expectation, and perception, 4) Acceptance and belonging, and 5) Gender.

Family circumstances of the dropout population differed from those of students who stayed in school. A higher proportion of dropouts lived in single-parent families, had parents who were less likely to have completed postsecondary education, and had substantially lower average family incomes (Robertson, 2007). These findings are consistent with previous research indicating students with lower socio-economic status (SES) are significantly more at risk of dropping out (Chuang; de Broucker 2005; Gingras, Bowlby & Pilon 2001; HRDC 2000a).

Academic achievement was connected with many students who eventually dropped out. However, not all students had poor grades. More than a third of those students had average marks above 70%, which challenges assumptions that dropouts have failing grades. Students who were to become dropouts, tended to report lower levels of self-efficacy which may be worth investigating further (Robertson, 2007).

Motivation, expectations and perceptions were influential factors. Perhaps surprisingly, 59% of those who would soon drop out of high school said that they wanted to go on to college or university. Perceptions of parental expectations figured prominently in shaping students' educational aspirations. Those who were to become dropouts significantly underestimated the importance their parents placed on completing high school and further education. Dropouts more

often than continuers, considered discipline to be handled "unfairly" in their school and felt students were not respected and that their school "was not a friendly place" (Robertson, 2007).

Robertson (2007) notes that perceptions of oneself, one's parents, the relationship between school and work success, even of the way others think, appear to play significant roles in the process of dropping out. Dropouts were less likely than continuers' to link education with their career goals and more likely to believe that they weren't "smart enough" to do well in college. It seems these psychological and personal factors are associated with disengagement and dropping out, an area that could benefit with more research.

Acceptance and belonging were also important factors. Dropouts hung out with people who they perceived as being much like themselves, who held similar views about the relative unimportance of school. Among future dropouts, approximately 25% reported being kicked out of school, skipping classes at least weekly, or sent to the principal for behaviour reasons. By the age of 15, future dropouts were much more likely to feel estranged from the academic and social lives of their schools, a disengagement that was reflected in their lower participation in activities outside school, and were twice as likely to work more than 20 hours per week (Robertson, 2007).

Gender has been identified as a key factor in early school leaving in Canada (Bowlby & McMullen 2002; de Broucker, 2005; Gingras, Bowlby, & Pilon, 2001; HRDC 2000a; Shaienks, Eisl-Culkin, & Bussiere, 2006). Unlike males, females perceived postsecondary education positively at age 15, and they were more likely to aspire to continue their studies. Males were more likely to be "getting into trouble" at school and have close friends who were labeled as troublemakers. Female dropouts also had better grades, were more engaged academically, and had superior reading scores compared with male dropouts. The biggest reason females left school early, was because more than 25% have at least one dependent child (Robertson, 2007).

It is clear that gender is associated with the dropping out process. Research in Australia, the United Kingdom, and United States has shown similar gender links (Looker & Thiessen, 2008) that males are consistently more likely than females to drop out of school and tend to do so at an earlier age (HRDC, 2000a).

The research suggests that what is going on at school is only part of the story. Specifically, family circumstance; motivation, expectation, perception; acceptance and belonging and gender were all factors involved with student disengagement (Robertson, 2007).

Life as a Dropout (Implications)

While there may be a lack of understanding about the underlying reasons why students dropout, the research shows dropping out of high school has considerable negative consequences such as low literacy (Finnie & Meng, 2006) and skill levels (HRDC, 2000), limiting their ability to integrate into the economy and society (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002). Dropouts have higher levels of unemployment (Bushnik, Barr-Telford & Bussiere, 2004) and lower incomes (Prince & Jenkins, 2005). The same factors which lead people to drop out such as academic ability, low self-esteem, or lack of social skills, may inhibit their chance of success in the workforce (HRDC, 2000a). Society as a whole is affected negatively (Ball & Lamb, 2001; Dynarski & Gleason, 1999) including higher rates of crime, alcohol and drug abuse and poor health (HRDC, 2000) and higher rates of social assistance (Martin & Halperin, 2006) are linked. Chuang (1997) states that high school dropouts are the most pressing social issue in the United States. Considering the comprehensive benefits of earning a high school diploma and the societal costs of dropping out, the importance of a second chance option is crucial (Looker & Thiessen, 2008).

Historically, drop-out rates have been consistently lower for women than for men. Over the past two decades, drop-out rates have decreased for both men and women, from 19.2% for men and 14.0% for women in 1990-1991, to 9.7% for men and 5.9% for women in 2011-2012 (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2014). Young Canadians have increasingly stayed in school. Changes in the economy and in society have increased the value of education. The highest levels of knowledge based sectors are found in health and education, and include others such as business services, finance and insurance, communications and utilities, oil and gas, and manufacturing. With technological advances and a need for increased skill sophistication, the demand for unskilled or semi-skilled workers in manufacturing and the resource sector has dropped (Canada Council on Learning, 2005).

Unemployment rates during the 1990's and 2000's for dropouts were over five percentage points above high school graduates and the national average rate, yet in spite of this many do not finish high school (Bowlby & McMullen, 2002). The fact that dropouts face higher unemployment and lower wages and job satisfaction, raises questions around males reporting leaving school early for work or financial reasons (Gilmore, 2010).

Bowlby and McMullen (2002) found young men tended to report they dropped out because they were not engaged in school and/or they wanted to work and earn money. Raymond (2009) found male dropout rates stayed steady even during changing economic environments, and male dropouts do not return even when unemployment rates are high. In 2007/2008, the unemployment rate for dropouts aged 20-24 was more than double that of high school graduates the same age and even those who were employed tended to have lower job quality and financial benefits than high school graduates (Gilmore, 2010).

Males report that they drop out of school to work and earn money, but the statistics do not reflect this reality. Instead, dropouts face high unemployment, low wages and low job satisfaction, which creates doubt as to the true reason they left. It is clear more research is needed in this area to explore further the meaning of feeling not engaged and examining more closely wanting to work and earn money in order to identify the reasons males leave school (Gilmore, 2010). Moreover, it is interesting to note statistics from the correctional system reveal 78% of the male admissions to Canadian federal prisons did not graduate high school (Boe, 2005).

With regards to cultural backgrounds and graduation rates, the aboriginal population is grossly disadvantaged as young aboriginal people are more likely to drop out than non-Aboriginals (Bushnik, 2003; Gingras, Bowlby & Pilon, 2001). In 2009/2010, the dropout rate among First Nations people living off-reserve was 25.8% and 18.9% for Métis and Inuit aged 20 to 24, compared to 8.5% for non-Aboriginal people in Canada (Gilmore, 2010).

However, what is interesting to note is that aboriginal students have a higher return rate to second chance schools than non aboriginals (Gilmore, 2010). The reasons for this are worth investigating further. For example, are class sizes and flexibility found in second chance systems helping factors? How do culture, socioeconomic status, and societal stereotypes play a role? How do psychological factors of the student influence whether they stay in school or leave again? The issues contributing to this disparity need to be identified so that all Canadians can have equal access to education.

Life as a Second Chance System Student

Only a few studies have examined trends in, and the determinants of dropping out in Canada and only one addressed school returns by dropouts (Bushnik et al., 2004). Dropouts who return to school seem to demonstrate a desire to graduate, yet forty percent of returnees dropout

again. The high percentage of failed returnees clearly illustrates that individuals face greater barriers than simply returning to school. Even when returning to school, only 26% of males successfully completed (Raymond, 2008). Second chance options are available to those who drop out of secondary school and later wish to continue their education allowing individuals a chance to earn a high school diploma or equivalent or to pursue post-secondary education (PSE) without one (by completing an entrance exam or being a mature student) (OECD 2000).

Crocker (2001) highlights that in Canada there is no comprehensive second chance system, but rather various options available which target different groups; they include public and private schools, alternative learning centres, community based non-profit programs, community college and the adult education system (Martin & Halperin, 2006). One reason Canada has a higher graduation rate compared to other countries is the availability of second chance options to complete high school (Gingras, Bowlby, & Pilon, 2001). However, not everyone who returns to the second chance system is successful. Prince and Jenkins (2005) note those who enroll in second chance options at community colleges may be less likely than others to complete their program.

Looker and Thiessen (2008) make a distinguishing point, that in Canada it is often the students who pursue their "second chance", rather than the system specifically giving them a "second chance" (p. 7). Although providing a second chance system is seen as important, there is some criticism that programs produce mixed results (Lerman, 2000), and lack systematic evaluation of their effectiveness (Mitchell & Waiwaiole, 2003). However, it is important to note that second chance programs often have students with multiple barriers to education, therefore it

is not clear what results are realistic (Looker & Thiessen, 2008), though long term programming seems to be more effective rather than short term interventions (Thiessen, Cottrell & Looker, 2005).

There is considerably less research on the second chance system and students compared to the area of high school dropouts. However, some patterns can be identified around which factors affect whether individuals return to the second chance system or not (Looker & Thiessen, 2008).

Age and length of time out of school are deterrent factors regarding whether dropouts return (Chuang, 1997). Interestingly, grades seem to have less of an effect whether a dropout returns to school or not (Berktold, Geis, & Kaugman, 1998), however those who have repeated a grade are less likely to attend the second chance system (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004), suggesting the long term stigma of failing a grade may be a factor (Looker & Thiessen, 2008). Suh and Suh (2006) found dropouts who were independent learners and had strong study skills were more likely to complete their high school education after dropping out. Finally, Chuang (1997) notes more females than males return to the second chance system, reiterating other studies where the gender differences tend to be noted but the underlying causes are rarely explored (Raymond, 2008). This is another example highlighting the importance of identifying the factors contributing to gender inequality in schools. Finally, Martin & Halperin, (2006) summarize dropouts need multiple supports because they have been impeded by educational, social, economic, and psychological barriers.

What Are the Risk Factors for Second Chance Students?

There is some debate on what constitutes risk. Those who dropout are labelled "at risk" because they may not graduate or because of their background characteristics (Crocker, 2001). Trudel and Puentas-Neuman (2001) distinguish between risk and vulnerability, seeing risk reflect

the social situation or background of the individual which may or may not mean that the individual is vulnerable. This distinction recognizes protective factors that can be introduced that make a person less vulnerable, even if they are "at risk". Schonert-Reichl (2001) states risk as a continuum which can be minimized or exacerbated by interventions at the school and home level.

Terrise (2001) believes resilient youth succeed despite adversity. Berktold, Geis and Kaufman (1998) found that almost half of dropouts surveyed actively looked into alternative, general education diploma (GED) or second chance options. Second chance students who reconnect to the education system can be viewed as resilient (Looker & Thiessen, 2008). Wayman (2002) explains by focusing on the concept of resilience rather than risk factors are more effective because the resilience factors are more easily affected by educators. Catterall (1998) suggests focusing on resilience will recognize individual potential within an at-risk population and avoid labelling groups.

In addition to risk factors, it is important to consider the protective factors of supportive family, school and social environments which will recognize the various strengths that students bring with them or develop in school and out of school (Wotherspoon & Schissel, 2001).

There is a gap in the research examining students once they return to the second chance system leaving many questions unanswered. Are the hindering factors of high school students the same as second chance students? Are there psychological factors that make second chance students stay in school or drop out again? Te Riele (2009) states people tend to leave school because they are alienated, have negative experiences with teachers and find the curriculum irrelevant, uninteresting and too difficult. How do relationships with teachers affect second chance system students? Munns and McFadden (2000) recognized the powerlessness and lack of

culturally sensitive interventions aboriginal students experienced in the school system, however as Gilmore (2010) pointed out, there is a higher rate of enrollment of aboriginal students in the second chance system compared to non-aboriginals. Understanding the factors behind this would be valuable to foster better learning environments for disadvantaged groups.

With a lack of research on males who return to school via adult education and the second chance system, there remain many questions. Do the five factors which lead to disengagement in high school students as outlined by Robertson (2007): family; academics; motivation, expectation and perception; acceptance and belonging and gender, apply to students in the second chance system? Are there unique factors that aid or impede students who return to the second chance system? How do they experience the transition of returning to school as an adult? How do gender stereotypes and societal expectations influence communication and emotional expression for males in school? What psychological factors are involved? Many males may have had negative experiences of school; what role does shame play whether students stay or leave the second chance system? Finally, what are the needs of male second chance students?

Looker and Thiessen (2008) highlight that there is limited research on second chance youth compared to those who initially drop out of the school system. Their analyses illustrates further research is needed to identify the underlying dynamics of the factors associated with returning to the second chance school system. Finally, I hope to shed some light with the research question: *What Has Helped and Hindered the Experience of Adult Males Who Returned to School?*

Interventions

Martin and Halperin (2006) found that successful second chance programs include information and computer technology (ICT), flexible year round learning, close relationships with teachers, career oriented goals and opportunities for employment, clear codes of conduct

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and intensive support services. Dynarski and Gleason (1999) reported another effective factor for further education was having a second chance program located on a community college campus.

In summary, there are no concrete reasons provided why males have lower academic achievement, experience more behavioural issues and dropout more compared to females. What is most concerning is that there seems to be little understanding of the issues associated with this disparity and even less interventions put forward. Gender should not be a factor for high school graduation and its benefits, however that is what the statistics reveal.

Finding out what helps or hinders males who return to adult education and the second chance system would provide a starting point to bridge the gap between those who graduated and those who need a second chance.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative Method

The purpose of this study was to understand through the student's perspective what has helped and hindered them in their experience in adult education. Qualitative research was used to better understand a phenomenon which little is known about or to gain new perspectives and more in-depth information on something that may be difficult to convey quantitatively (Hoepfl, 1997).

Critical Incident Technique

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) was developed by John Flanagan (1954) during World War II to help identify effective pilot performance. The technique has a set of simple interview procedures which allows the collection of information from people regarding their direct observations of their own or other's behaviours (Woolsey, p. 243, 1986). Flanagan's (1954) CIT is important for this kind of knowledge because it is a method that follows a set of procedures to observe and record human behaviour to answer problems or questions such as the research questions: "How have males experienced returning to school: What has helped and hindered?" Butterfield et al. (2005) reviewed the origin and evolution of the CIT research method over the past 50 years which identified the use of credibility checks that maintained the intent of Flanagan's (1954) work and improved the reliability of CIT findings. From these findings, Butterfield et al. (2005) suggested using nine credibility checks when using CIT.

For this study, the enhanced critical incident technique (ECIT) which includes the nine credibility checks used to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio & Amundson, 2009). Using the ECIT, the second chance adult education

students identified factors that were critical in their experience of returning to school, and a list of categories emerged identifying what helped and what hindered the student returnees.

Definition of Terms

The term 'incident' is defined by Flanagan (1954) as "any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to make about the person performing the act" (p. 327). When regarding a situation, he defines the term 'critical' "where the purpose of intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects" (p. 327).

The CIT (Flanagan, 1954) contained five steps for collecting data: (1) General Aims, (2) Plans and Specifications, (3) Collecting the Data, (4) Analyzing the Data and (5) Interpreting and Reporting. Flanagan (1954) noted these steps should be adapted for each study using the CIT.

(1) Aim of the Study

The first step is a statement of objectives of the study or description explaining exactly what to do or not to do (Flanagan, 1954). In this study, the participant's experience of returning to school as an adult will be investigated. Specifically, the aim was to investigate what helped and hindered adult males after they enrolled in the adult education system.

(2) Plans and Specifications

The second step determined who would be making the observations, what observations would be considered a critical incident and who would be observed (Flanagan, 1954). A recruitment letter was sent to the Vancouver School Board for permission to recruit adult education students (Appendix A). The participants in this study were recruited through posters (Appendix B) placed at the Vancouver School Board's six adult education centres.

Interested participants contacted the researcher by email or telephone and were provided details about the study and then asked a series of questions to confirm their eligibility over the telephone (Appendix C). If the interested participant met the criteria, an interview time and place was set up. A consent form (Appendix D) and a self report demographic form (Appendix E) was given to the participants at the start of the first interview.

 (3) Collecting the Data

The third step, data collection was accomplished through individual interviews with specific questions asked (Flanagan, 1954). In this investigation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve students aged 19-49 years of age. Participants were enrolled or recently enrolled within the previous year and self-identified as being successful in at least one course in the adult education system in Vancouver, British Columbia.

In the first interview the participants were reminded of the purpose of the study and then asked to speak about themselves and describe why they enrolled in adult education. Then they were asked the first question: "Describe what your experience has been in the adult education system?"

After they answered the first question, the following questions were asked:

1. "What has helped you in adult education?"

2. "What has hindered you in adult education?"

3. "What do you think would have helped?"

Probes and prompts were used for clarity and a brief summary concluded the interview. Following the first interview, the researcher extracted critical incidents and grouped them into helping and hindering categories for the participants to review.

Participant cross checking took place by email communication after the first interview and allowed participants an opportunity to read the summary and confirm that their critical incidents were recorded accurately and categorized correctly as helping or hindering. It was also an opportunity for the participant to be heard. The participants were encouraged to make any changes, deletions or additions during this second interview to ensure data accuracy. When they were satisfied the critical incidents were articulated accurately, each participant gave their final approval.

(4) Analyzing the Data

After the two interviews, the data was analyzed in order to "summarize and describe the data in an efficient manner so that it can be effectively used for many practical purposes" (Flanagan, 1954, p. 344). The researcher worked directly from the transcripts derived from the audio recordings and noted each critical incident. Categories were formulated by grouping the critical incidents into similar themes. The researcher tracked when new categories stopped emerging, a sign that exhaustiveness had been met (Butterfield et al., 2005).

(5) Interpreting and Reporting

The fifth and final step was interpreting and reporting the findings. A total of 346 critical incidents were reported by twelve male participants (five were born in Canada and two self-identified as having aboriginal or Metis heritage) regarding what helped and hindered their experience in adult education. Categories with self-explanatory titles and definitions were created. Reliability and validity was established following the work of Butterfield et al. (2009) who identified and described an effective approach using the ECIT research method.

Butterfield et al. (2009) have suggested nine credibility checks when using ECIT. This investigation will follow the nine suggested credibility checks. They are:

1. *Audiotaping interviews*. Descriptive validity took place by audio-recording all of the interviews and then working directly from the typed transcripts and tapes.

2. *Interview fidelity*. An expert, a University of British Columbia graduate student familiar with ECIT, was asked to read a transcript from every fourth interview to ensure that (a) the CIT research method was followed, (b) the interviewer was not asking leading questions, and (c) the interview guide was being followed. The expert deemed the researcher was following the ECIT method properly.

3. *Independent extraction of critical incidents (CI).* An independent judge, a Master's level counsellor familiar with the ECIT method, reviewed three transcripts (which represented 25%) and identified what they thought were critical incidents. The researcher compared what they extracted and resolved discrepancies. Several incidents were not entirely in agreement due to the lack of evidence or clarity related to English being a second language for some participants. The percentage of agreement for this credibility check was 95%.

4. *Exhaustiveness.* New categories stopped emerging after eight interviews, which indicated exhaustiveness was met.

5. *Participation rates.* The participation rate was calculated by including the participant numbers for every critical incident (CI) or wish list (WL) item placed into a category. The number of participants in each category was divided by the total number of participants which revealed the participation rate. In this study, the participation rate ranged from 33% to 100% which is above the 25% established to be considered valid.

6. *Placing incidents into categories by an independent judge.* An independent judge, an individual with a graduate degree familiar with data analysis, placed 90 (which represented 25%), CI and WL items labeled on index cards, into the categories created by the researcher

resulting in a match rate of 91%. Andersson and Nilsson (1964) suggested a minimum match rate of 80% for this credibility check.

7. *Cross checking by participants.* After all the data was coded from the first interview, communication via email was conducted with participants to review the interpretations made by the researcher. This provided an opportunity for the participants to provide feedback on the categories and to confirm and honour their lived experiences. Due to miscommunication, email addresses were not received from several participants. Eight out of twelve participants were sent an email which contained the categories developed by the researcher from their interviews. Four participants replied back and all four reported the categories accurately reflected their interview and experience. No omissions or changes were made and one hindering incident was added. The response rate may be a reflection of the time lapse from the first interview and the busy and transitional lives of the participants. One participant reported during the interview that they were losing their housing as a result of gentrification and were looking for stable housing. It is also possible that email messages may have been considered spam or directed to the junk mail folder. Finally, there was no financial honorarium offered for the second interview which may have also been a factor.

8. *Expert opinion.* Tentative categories were submitted to two adult education teachers currently teaching in the system. Three questions were asked: 1) Do you find the categories to be useful? 2) Are you surprised by any of the categories? 3) Do you think there is anything missing based on your experience (Butterfield et al., 2005; Flanagan, 1954)? The experts reported the categories were useful and made sense. They provided feedback around merging three tentative categories related to teaching into two. They did not report any categories they thought were missing.

9. *Theoretical agreement.* The helping and hindering categories found in this investigation was compared with existing literature to determine whether support existed for the categories defined in the present study. If there was no support in the present literature, it did not mean the results were invalid. It may simply mean further research is required in that specific area (Butterfield et al., 2005, p. 488). In this study, theoretical agreement was not found for all of the categories as there was little research in the literature related to adult males attending adult education in Canada. Therefore, this study may have revealed new information not previously discussed in the literature.

Participants

Twelve male participants between the ages of 19-49 years were interviewed. Table 1 lists the participants' demographic information. This age group included young adults up to middle aged adults who reflected a population likely to share similar traits and motivations for returning to school such as finding better employment opportunities, high school graduation or post-secondary preparation. Older adults may have different purposes for returning to school such as computer technology upgrading or for the love of lifelong learning and therefore were not the focus of this study. Participants self-reported as having been successful in at least one course in the Adult Education system to better allow for a full reflection of their experience. Participants were all current adult education students and the majority enrolled in grade 11 and 12 classes.

This study was not focused on students who were solely focused on learning English as a second language (ESL). However, this study did include participants whose second language was English which is reflective of the adult education student population in Vancouver, British Columbia. Nevertheless, a standard level of proficiency in the English language was still a requirement to ensure proper communication and in-depth interviews could occur. This study

Table 1: <u>Summary of Participant Demographics</u>

Participant	Age	Country of Birth	Years Lived in Canada	Income Source	Grade 12 Diploma (Canada)
01	19	Taiwan	5	Unemployed	No*
02	19	Canada	since birth	Other	No*
03	25	Canada	since birth	Income Assistance	No
04	49	Afghanistan	9	Disability Assistance	No
05	21	Canada	since birth	Working	No
06	26	Canada	since birth	Income Assistance	No
07	34	Mexico	3	Working	No
08	33	El Salvador	20	Employment Insurance	No
09	19	Canada	since birth	Working	No
10	33	China	6	Unemployed	Yes/BA China
11	45	Poland	7	Working part time	No/MA Europe
12	42	Philippines	23	Working	No/BA Asia

* Participants were enrolled in last remaining course (English 12) for graduation requirements

was interested in student participants who were taking high school level courses and hence likely to realize the benefits of high school completion as outlined previously in the literature review. Several participants reported they were recreational drug users and was included as an inclusion criterion as this likely was a reflection of the population being studied. No participants reported suffering from severe mental illness at the time of the interview. Participants were from three of the five adult education centres operated by the Vancouver School Board.

Exclusion criteria

Participants who had previously obtained university degrees from a North American institution, as this did not reflect the demographic or experience sought. Low functioning English language learners, as this study was not focused on factors or barriers primarily related to low English language skills. Serious mental illness or drug dependence as this may be the main inhibitive factors affecting participants and not what the study was researching. Students who did not report being successful in at least one course while enrolled in adult education.

Researcher Role/Stance

Efforts were made using the nine credibility checks to reduce researcher bias. However, the current study may have been affected by my world view. I am a heterosexual White male graduate student in my late 30's who grew up in a mining town in northern Ontario. The first time I witnessed a homeless person was when I visited Toronto, Ontario and my first experience witnessing extreme poverty, mental illness and drug addiction was when I moved to Vancouver, BC. It was in Vancouver where I witnessed the stark difference between the wealthy west side and the poverty stricken downtown eastside of the city. I realized how my views seemed to differ from many who grew up in Vancouver which led me to question how inequality and the world worked.

Having worked for the past seven years in adult education, specifically in the low socio-economic area of the downtown east side of Vancouver, I have had the privilege to teach many adult students who returned to complete their high school education. I researched an area which I am passionate about. I see education as both a pathway to a better future as well as a barrier itself to those who don't fit into the "one size fits all" model of school. I would like to see all citizens of Canada have equal access to adult education and equal opportunity for graduating with a high school diploma and the benefits that come with doing so. I have an expectation that the province of British Columbia will provide equal and open access to education in its education policies. Unfortunately, the current provincial government has reduced funding to the adult education system which has resulted in the loss of tuition free courses for many of those who would like to access adult education. My bias towards the research is fairly obvious; I feel the adult education system is a pathway for people to better their lives and allow everyone a chance to contribute to British Columbia socially and economically. I was open to hearing how males viewed their experience and what has helped and hindered them after they returned to school as an adult.

Chapter 4: Results

Twelve male participants, between the ages of 19 and 49 years, identified a total of 346 incidents. Five participants were born in Canada and two self-identified as having aboriginal or Metis heritage. A summary of demographic information can be found on Table 1. The critical incidents reflected what helped and hindered the experience of adult male students who returned to school via the adult education system. Eleven helping categories and seven hindering categories evolved after the data was analyzed. In this section the eleven helping categories and seven hindering categories will be described. Table 2 lists all the categories in order of highest participation rate. The final question the participants were asked "What do you think would have helped?" will also be detailed at the end of this section and titled 'Wish List'.

Helping Categories

Category 1: Teacher Encouragement, Support and Acceptance (42 incidents, 100% participation rate)

This category emphasized how teachers offered encouragement and support and how participants felt a personal connection with the teacher and viewed them as a real person who really wanted to help them. Participants felt the teacher was fair, accepted them and it was okay to make mistakes without feeling embarrassed or judged. They felt teachers were interested in them as a person and understood their personal or life circumstances and challenges. Participants reported they were affected positively on a personal and emotional level.

Example 1 (Participant 01)

They're right at your shoulders, the teachers. They're right there, not at the front of the class. And you don't have to like buzz to ask questions. Yeah, so all of the teachers are aware you are in this stream, there are reasons you ended up here and they understand that and they kind of extend their own personalities. There is more of a real person to person connection.

Table 2: **List of Categories, Frequency of Critical Incidents and Participation Rate**

Category	Frequency (# of critical incidents for each category)	Participation Rate (% of participation in each category)
Helping Categories		
1. Teacher Encouragement, Support and Acceptance	42	100%
2. Course Schedule, Timetable and Flexibility	32	83%
3. Goals, Motivation and Expectations	31	83%
4. Acceptance and Belonging	28	83%
5. Stability and Support Systems	17	75%
6. Autonomy	25	67%
7. Teacher Curriculum Presentation and Delivery	22	67%
8. Personal Growth, Maturity and Self Awareness	18	67%
9. Free or Low Cost	15	67%
10. Facilities, Location and Classroom Environment	11	50%
11. Computer Literacy and Technology	5	33%
Hindering Categories		
1. Education System Based Instability	14	75%
2. Health, Emotional Struggles, Rejection and Judgement	29	67%
3. Financial, Work and Family Responsibilities	19	67%
4. Academic Struggles, Course Design and Delivery	7	42%
5. Immigration, Literacy and Cultural Barriers	12	33%
6. Lack of Goals, Motivation and Expectations	12	33%
7. Facilities, Classroom and Supplies	7	33%
Total Number of Critical Incidents	**346**	

Example 2 (Participant 10)

Everyone is trying to be as proficient as possible, not being judged immediately, not being punished for making contractions, yeah mistakes, so I think people or at least myself feel they are very convenient and it is very helpful. You know, I'm trying and if I'm mistaking and doing some mistakes and wrong happens, I just try again and usually I succeed and that is encouraging.

Example 3 (Participant 08)

And I think that the people, the good teachers at the adult education centre are people that really want to help you and they are used to working with people that are struggling with the language and struggling at home. Some of these people have full time jobs and kids and, like you know it's a struggle, but they are always there to encourage you. I think mentorship has been really helpful. Oh, well you know it's easier to learn from a human being like my teacher and I like to learn from him because I can relate to him. And it helps to learn from a person and a mentor because I appreciate a mentor and respect and value it in my life, especially when they are trying to do something for me.

Category 2: Course Schedule, Timetable and Flexibility (32 incidents, 83% participation rate)

This category reflected how the varied course schedule provided participants the flexibility to manage their time efficiently between school, work and family obligations. In addition to courses offered in mornings, afternoons, evenings and weekends, participants were able to take one course at a time with nine week quarter terms, which allowed them to be more organized and focused. The longer class times provided adequate time to learn and to complete homework in class and self-paced courses allowed participants to drop in to the learning centre anytime to do course work or tests.

Example 1 (Participant 12)

Four hours. There's a lot of time in the classroom, right? You've got a 15 minute break, so around three and a half hours in one day. I find that positive instead of going every day. If you are going everyday then the time that you are going, every time you go travelling is another factor right. So I found this is excellent for me.

Example 2 (Participant 01)

In high school you have more courses, you have eight courses. And here it is only two. So it's like 75% easier for time management. And I just like to be, you know, organized. And adult education is organized because you only have that amount of time (condensed course in a nine week term). You have to be organized. You cannot afford not to be.

Example 3 (Participant 09)

The big thing was the shorter hours though, and the class, the one class at a time kind of deal. I was more focused and it allowed me to mark my progress more easily. Like I had to get math, then I can get that out of there and I don't have to worry about it.

Category 3: Goals, Motivation and Expectations (31 incidents, 83% participation rate)

This category identified the participant's attitude toward education, their expectations and goals. They explained how their goals of graduating with a high school diploma, attending post-secondary or hoping for a better job motivated them while in the adult education system.

Example 1 (Participant 06)

I am hoping to get a diploma, my high school diploma. I want to try to become a psychology nurse or a nurse in general.

Example 2 (Participant 07)

Well, being prepared in English is one of my main goals, to write it down, to write better. I can speak better than I can write, my writing is very bad. So, and math. I would like to go to BCIT to take a small business career or something. I don't want to be working all the time in construction, it is hard work. Now I am young, so I can do it, but not in the future. And, I don't know, I just like studying because I enjoy it, I enjoy learning and stuff.

Example 3 (Participant 12)

First, to develop my English and I am currently working at the (charitable organization) as a manager and one of my most difficulties is expressing myself. And part of my role is sending emails and sometimes they don't understand them. One in particular I'm talking about.

Category 4: Acceptance and Belonging (28 incidents, 83% participation rate)

In this category participants spoke about the friendliness, genuineness and good behaviour of their classmates and the effect on them, which included feeling more calm and engaged. They felt accepted because there were no social pressures or expectations to worry about and felt united with their peers because they all shared the same goal of getting their diploma, even if they all had different backgrounds and ages.

Example (Participant 01)

I think like, I really like adult school. A bizarre place for a person like me who don't focus on socializing, just focus on skill, which very few people that I met in high school do. And here, when a person is doing good, people like me ironically. And you know, I found some people I like more than in high school.

Example 2 (Participant 05)

It's like, okay then, adult school brings you, if you're not in class… and there are people kind of in the same situation as you. So it's not like, you don't have to know the person, but you know they are in the same situation. There is no stand-ins. No rankings.

Example 3 (Participant 09)

And they're not just passing you without you understanding and that's not something you get in school with how many thousands of people. And the social thing too, there is a whole lot less going on, socially in a sense. Drama and all the things that are very attention pulling. Uh, for me it's the women, there is a lot more women in the regular stream. There are other things like not fitting into the clique properly. Things that are very willing to take priority, especially in your mind set, rather than actual school work.

Category 5: Support Systems and Stability (17 incidents, 75% participation rate)

Participants in this category spoke about how their family members, workplace, and professional services and how stable housing or school environment was important and allowed them to be successful.

Example 1 (Participant 03)

Going to school, I was taking care of my daughter and just staying clean and sober and healthy eating and just living life good. Having my family to do whatever, so a support

network. And my drug and alcohol counsellor, just a whole bunch of stuff, just positive stuff.

<u>Example 2 (Participant 08)</u>

I think having a place (adult school) in which I can become consistent with something, has been really helpful. I think that consistency is the most import thing that you can have when you are trying to learn something new. And also, consistency becomes more valuable the longer you maintain it and depreciates the quicker the moment you stop, unless you become a master. And having a place I can just go.

<u>Example 3 (Participant 12)</u>

And for me, it's just work. And the company is really excellent and able to help me and give me time while working at the same time and going to school. And not a lot of companies will do that, so I'm really thankful for that.

Category 6: Autonomy (25 incidents, 67% participation rate)

Participants in this category spoke about being able to choose to go to class or not, and the importance of being able to catch up after missed classes. They report a sense of independence and control over their experience and some spoke about how they are not inhibited by other students or the system like in high school.

<u>Example 1 (Participant 01)</u>

While in adult school you came here with your own responsibility. You choose to come here. You pay them money and you choose your own course, which you take. Pretty much all the responsibility is on yourself. You don't need to worry about others, don't need to worry about the VSB because they send you here because you are a kid.

<u>Example 2 (Participant 05)</u>

Just because of life, I worked then I came out here and I'm doing this now. It's like, there's a lot… I've been here for seven months already and I've been going or I've been trying to get my high school on my own terms since I was 18.

<u>Example 3 (Participant 03)</u>

And a bit of like, slack, like flexibility you know? Because you got to go to work or family trouble or whatever, relationship trouble or you get sick. You know you get drunk one day, honestly right, it happens to everybody right? You wake up and it's Monday and

you think "I don't want go to school today". And you come back the next day and to class and you are able to catch up. That's what I've done.

Category 7: Teacher Curriculum Presentation and Delivery (22 incidents, 67% participation rate)

Participants in this category spoke about how teachers focused on learning and skill acquisition and how they were flexible to different learning needs. Teachers explained and helped them understand the course content and context and made the course material relative, interesting and meaningful with various teaching methods (ie. Group work, field trips, etc).

Example 1 (Participant 12)

Actually the teacher I have, I really enjoy it because just English might be boring for everyone, just basic English, but this teacher that I have right now, it's like "Oh this is amazing" because you start taking it to the next level of how the reality should be. Like how things look, the surrounding that we have. A lot of explanations, and a lot of sight topics. I enjoy that. There are more things that I didn't know about, history or whatever. It's inviting us to be more attentive, to pay attention.

Example 2 (Participant 01)

I couldn't focus in high school because I was irritated by homework which is just a little part in the mark. And it makes you tired and hard to focus. But in adult school no homework whatsoever. In class writing and in class work, you do it here, you do it good and you are good to go.

Example 3 (Participant 03)

Oh, a little bit of flexibility, and um and just you know, the way it's explained. Like the way the teacher explains math, like really straight up and always the same. Not giving me like "oh you can do it this or that way". No, just learn the math one way. That's always been good. You always learn the same type of style and you know you can always come up with an alternative solution but not alternative ways to solve it.

Category 8: Personal Growth, Maturity and Self Awareness (18 incidents, 67% participation rate)

Participants in this category spoke how they matured, learned from the past and experienced personal growth such as increased self-confidence, self-awareness and self compassion.

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Example 1 (Participant 07)

I wish I studied younger but it was different and I moved back to Mexico and came back. But yeah I used to always want to go back to school but I waited. I don't know why I didn't do it when I was young. I don't' know, it was a different story. I was hanging around people who said to work and make money and that it is more important than anything. But then you grow up and you think differently about society and you have your own beliefs. As you get older you realized, because before I wasn't involved with the right people.

Example 2 (Participant 09)

I remember that when I first started the adult education stream, it was like I could kind of take a breath and chill out for the first time since I finished grade 10. I went from barely hanging on to making progress… I like talking about how it's helped me. And other people may not know so why not talk?

Example 3 (Participant 08)

I think the reasons why I wasn't able to stick with it before were mostly to do with self-image. When I was young I thought people would be judging me. Like "he's so young and he dropped out". And once I got older it was like "he's so old and he's doing it"! Also, for myself I didn't pick the right route. For example, the majority of time when I tried adult education I went through the self-paced course. But what I found from experience is that it is much easier to be consistent with a study practice when you are doing it with people (structured classes). Because then it becomes like a social activity. It is fun to work with people.

Category 9: Free or Low Cost (15 incidents, 67% participation rate)

Participants in this category spoke about how free or low assessment and registration fees allowed them to attend school and take the courses required to pass and graduate. This was helpful as some participants were on income assistance, experienced financial hardships or needed to take a course multiple times before passing.

Example 1 (Participant 11)

And the better thing is you don't have to pay the books, they can give you the print outs to save money and that is what I like. And you learn the same thing as with the books. Books are expensive and heavy.

Example 2 (Participant 4)

I come here because the fee twenty dollars is nothing. For twenty dollars we take a course and get a credit. And if I try to continue and try to finish I get an adult diploma and then I can apply everywhere because a diploma is needed. If you apply for jobs the first thing they ask you is if you have any certificates from Canada.

Example 3 (Participant 6)

Registration is twenty dollars I think. But since I am on income assistance they waive the fee. And that thing for books (deposit), that got waived too.

Category 10: Facilities, Location and Classroom Environment (11 incidents, 50% participation rate)

Participants in this category spoke how the location of the education centre and the classroom environment was important. A small number of students in a class meant more access and support from the teacher and a more comfortable environment. Centres which had bright windows, nice chairs and tables reportedly made it feel like a real school to participants.

Example 1 (Participant 6)

I loved the class size. We had a beautiful class. It looked like a regular classroom where the teacher would face in one direction instead of having to make the teacher twist and turn and almost contort their bodies. It was almost like I had a day at high school, which I have never been at.

Example 2 (Participant 7)

I knew I wanted to go back to school so I started searching and where I'm living the closest one was best for me, because most of the time I'm a very busy person so I just tried to look for a school that was very close by where I live.

Example 3 (Participant 11)

The class, there are not too many students in the class, compared to the Montreal school. That's good, so the teacher does not need to try to scream to reach the students in the corner. He can just use the average voice and he can have conversation between all the students. And the location is pretty good. The lighting, you can see outside through the windows, it feels comfortable.

Category 11: Computer Literacy and Technology (5 incidents, 33% participation rate)

Participants in this category spoke about how learning computer skills and using the internet

and search engines helped them to find information for their homework and with English.

Example 1 (Participant 8)

I think it is really helpful to have a computer and it's really helpful to have an internet connection. I can prepare man, like the internet is a wonderful tool. I have Google at home and that is really great because I really struggle, like I hate fractions and you can bet your ass there is a video out there about how to do fractions. The internet changed everything.

Example 2 (Participant 4)

Yeah, is very helpful. Even sometimes I work at the computer and it is helpful for me. For me and foreign people it helps with language and for me it was very hard and I have been helped by computers. If you do not know grammar you cannot know the language.

Example 3 (Participant 12)
I don't know how to analyze. For me to read a book or a letter, for me I can read but it is so hard to register it in my head. Maybe it's because there are some things (vocabulary) in there that I have to put in the reading, like sometimes it's very deep English. Some slang I have to look in the dictionary, but luckily nowadays you don't have to use a dictionary, you have your phone and sometime you can learn how to pronounce it which is helpful you know.

Hindering Categories

Category 1: School System Based Instability (13 incidents, 75% participation rate)

The participants in this category spoke about how cancelled classes due to low

enrollment disrupted their schedules and affected them. Those who had classes cancelled were

not always able or willing to attend a different education centre to take a replacement class and

therefore were not able to get the class they needed. The lack of courses offered at each centre

and difficulty with registering was also identified in this category.

Example 1 (Participant 7)

That is what I was doing at Main Street (education centre), but because they moved, I was going to do the same thing at this school, but they don't have that same English class so I have to go to the Gladstone location.

Example 2 (Participant 6)

Biology can only be taken at one location and the same with law. There is some classes that actually don't even go unless you are willing to pay extra. I guess sometimes people want or need a class not exactly to graduate but say you need it for a job but they don't offer the course because only seven people need it but 16 are required by the government, so those seven people are SOL (out of luck).

Example 3 (Participant 4)

This topic Social Justice 12 is very interesting for me and unfortunately when I came into the class, nobody was in the class. I sat for a half hour and then after I asked the principal and she says "I'm sorry, the class is cancelled" because not enough students. It is sad because I have a positive emotion to get in this class, a lot of useful subjects I can understand about law and about justice but one day it was gone…. And I want to take it here, I know every teacher and I know how the people is, it is useful for me. I enjoy so I don't change schools.

Category 2: Health, Emotional Struggles, Rejection and Judgement (30 incidents, 67% participation rate)

Participants in this category spoke about how they felt judged or rejected and how they experienced emotions in school such as anger, frustration, embarrassment or shame and how it affected their learning. Health constraints, stress from work or other life challenges are included.

Example 1 (Participant 5)

At times, it's like ok, I'm so close to knocking you (teacher) out on your ass right now, you have no idea. I'll act composed and I won't act on it, but it puts me in a zone where I'm like okay, now I just went from being okay, doing it myself to having to hear this person ask if I need help constantly for the last five minutes. Now I'm thinking about how I'm going to cool off because now I can't focus properly on my thing. So now I'm going to take time to actually cool off , get checked and go back to what's mine, but even then it sticks with me.

Example 2 (Participant 3)

Coffee and Pot, they counteract my ADHD which I've had a lot of trouble with. I had a time out in class the other day. I get overexcited.
Example 3 (Participant 4)

If he explains that with some negative I get nothing because you feeling that the teacher is angry. You get nothing. If I felt negative here I would never come back. I would not come back.

Category 3: Financial, Work and Family Responsibilities (19 incidents, 67% participation rate)

Participants in this category spoke about the challenges attending school while having work and family responsibilities or financial concerns.

Example 1 (Participant 12)

Like last night, we have a newspaper route every Tuesday and Thursday night right, delivering the newspaper with the kids and it's raining. So by the time I come home and I cook the dinner I'm like this on the couch and I'm trying to move my eyes. I've never in my life fallen asleep so early, like seven o'clock at night. I normally fall asleep at like ten or eleven. I was so tired last night. I was like, all education, all of this, I'll think about this tomorrow. Tomorrow is another day. I want to be refreshed and do my best. I didn't even study for the test today.

Example 2 (Participant 11)

Two years ago I was doing English, like equivalent to grade 8 or something and I was a janitor at that time. I thought I could do both at the same time but after there were two minds torn from the duty. So I decided to keep work because I had to make a living first. So after I save some money I quit the job and come back to school.

Example 3 (Participant 8)

The last time I tried adult education was three years ago. I tried it for a couple of weeks but I just quit, I just had to get a job.

Category 4: Academic Struggles, Course Design and Delivery (7 incidents, 42% participation rate)

Participants in this category spoke about their experience not understanding a subject such as math or English or how a teaching style or course delivery method, such as self-paced was ineffective for them.

Example 1 (Participant 9)

For math, because I thought it would be nice to go back into the classroom kind of setting, because it does have its advantages. It's got a time schedule that you follow but, yeah, I got lost.

Example 2 (Participant 4)

But with self-paced, I don't know. You have to know very well computers.

Example 3 (Participant 8)

The majority of the time when I tried adult education, I went through the self paced courses. And when you are trying to do it on your own, well I 'm not the type of person that can just sit in the room and drink coffee and just endlessly do a bunch of exercises. The brief time I did do that, I would get sick of it and never come back to it.

Category 5: Immigration, Literacy and Cultural Barriers (12 incidents, 33% participation rate)

Participants in this category reported about their experience trying to learn English as a second language and finding employment without a Canadian High School Diploma. They describe their experience of living in a different culture and their frustration of not being able to express their thoughts or ideas in English.

Example 1 (Participant 4)

I know five languages and English is very hard because in my first language, if I say some sentences I can write that sentence. In Russian, I speak in Russian. If I see in Russian some sentences I can write that. But English is very scary, in writing if you miss an article you are not a good writer.

Example 2 (Participant 11)

I want to say more about that, the culture stuff. For me I want as I said, I can only do one thing at a time. So if I want to speak English I have to speak English all day write and

read English. But on the other hand I am still Chinese. My blood is from China, so I cannot avoid meeting people from China and when I see them I have to speak Chinese.

<u>Example 3 (Participant 11)</u>

Life for an immigrant changes dramatically, so it's hard to sit down and focus on studying. When I came to Canada, I came with my wife. After three years, because life is so hard, we were struggling with jobs, family, relatives in China, language and social issues.

Category 6: Lack of Goals, Motivation and Expectation (12 incidents, 33% participation rate)

The participants in this category reported not having clear education or career goals. Those who focused on social inclusion rather than academics seemed to fall behind and males reported difficulty being able to express needs and ask for help. Participants seemed to have internal motivation to do it on their own.

<u>Example 1 (Participant 1)</u>

Males just like do what they want to do and sometimes forget what they need to do. And adult school is a short amount of time. By the time you do that and came back two weeks gone and you are getting 70% and 60% because you were doing that. And after that you probably give up on yourself, males do that a lot.

<u>Example 2 (Participant 2)</u>

Yeah, I actually feel like, I'm not trying to be like… I feel like males are supposed to be like, not all the time but I feel like males should take care. Not really take care all the time but for the woman and everything. But men should like just be strong.

<u>Example 3 (Participant 5)</u>

I've never had a career goal and I've always been sufficed with "you know what, I'm alive at the end of the day"….. I'm like, rather than having a piece of paper on the wall showing how smart I am, to government standards, you might as well have memorable experiences with it.

Category 7: Facilities, Classroom and School Supplies (6 incidents, 33% participation rate)

Participants in this category reported how school facilities such as physical space, layout and temperature of the classrooms and a lack of textbooks affected their experience.

Example 1 (Participant 1)

Well perhaps some things like if I could have textbooks that we shared. Not for individual to purchase, just to share. And whoever is taking the course gets to use it, because sometimes the photocopies get annoying.
Example 2 (Participant 6)

It was way too crowded and I had to work in a foot or two of space. And I have my binder and pens and I am supposed to copy from the textbook, and I had way less elbow room unless I stacked them and it got very hot quickly. I couldn't focus as well I guess. I couldn't have a clear mind so to speak because you have to worry about everything if you are too close to the person next to you or just about sitting in the lap of the person next to you or rubbing backs of the person behind you.

Example 3 (Participant 3)

It has small classrooms and it's all jammed up and everyone is bundled up into like two rows, it's crazy right? Yeah, you know it's like everyone has a seat and they all have to cram in on a little pint sized table and you can't put your work down.

Wish List

To conclude each interview the participants were asked "Is there anything you would have wanted while in adult education that would have been helpful?" Participants reflected and provided one or two wish list items each for a total of 18 which resulted in six categories: (1) Schedule and Courses, (2) Time, (3) Registration, (4) Wished they Started Earlier, (5) Stable Housing and (6) Student Social Area. Participants wished there were some more courses offered, such as sciences with laboratories and shop classes; particularly in the same centre they were attending. The second category identified was for more time to study. Specifically, wishing they did not have to work so they could attend adult education full time. The third category pertained to the registration system. A participant reported having to attend three different adult education

centres to register for a course and suggested an online registration system would allow students to register anytime and anywhere. It was also highlighted that the schedule does not come out far enough in advance for students who may need to make arrangements in advance with the workplace to plan accordingly. The fourth category was they wished they knew about adult education sooner. They preferred the atmosphere and support adult education provided and noted there was little advertising of the system and wondered how many other students could benefit if they only knew about it. The fifth category was for affordable and stable housing. Many participants lamented about how expensive Vancouver was to live in and the financial burdens they experienced. Several participants had experienced homelessness and mentioned how important stability was in order to be successful in adult education. Finally, the last category was about wanting a social area with a coffee machine for students to socialize during breaks instead of having to leave the centre. Although many participants felt accepted and united in the classroom they acknowledged many adult students have busy lives and a designated social area for students during break times would provide a chance to get to know the other students more.

Participants were reflective and thoughtful on what they felt would have helped them in their experience in adult education. Their input is important to hear and valuable for planning and program design at the school board and the individual education centres.

In summary, the validity of the categories was tested by using nine credibility checks in this investigation. They included: (1) independent extraction of incidents from transcriptions by a graduate level counsellor knowledgeable with the ECIT method, (2) participant cross checking via email provided the participants a chance to confirm the categories made sense and their experiences were adequately represented, (3) an independent judge, with a graduate degree and knowledgeable in data analysis placed 25 percent of critical incidents into categories tentatively

formed by the researcher achieving a 91% agreement level, (4) the point at which exhaustiveness was reached when new categories stopped emerging was attained after eight interviews, (5) field experts, adult education teachers who reviewed the categories to see if they were useful, made sense and if anything was missing, provided feedback to merge three categories into two, (6) the participation rate calculated by the number of participants who cited a specific incident divided by the total number of participants with a rate of 25 percent established for a category to be valid which ranged from 33% to 100%, (7) theoretical validity where researchers compare data from the study to the research in the literature, and included new information not found in the literature (8) descriptive validity, included transcribed audio interviews verbatim to ensure accuracy, and finally (9) interview fidelity, a University of British Columbia graduate student knowledgeable with the ECIT method who reviewed three transcriptions to ensure no leading questions were asked by the researcher and the proper ECIT interview method was followed. Lastly, theoretical agreement will be discussed in the Discussion chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion

After conducting interviews with 12 adult male participants on what helped and hindered their experience when they returned to school via the adult education system, 18 valid and reliable categories (11 helping and 7 hindering) emerged. The 18 categories included: 'Helping'- Teacher Encouragement, Support and Acceptance; Course Schedule, Timetable and Flexibility; Goals, Motivation and Expectations; Acceptance and Belonging; Stability and Support Systems; Autonomy; Teacher Curriculum Presentation and Delivery; Personal Growth, Maturity and Self Awareness; Free or Low Cost; Facilities, Location and Classroom Environment; Computer Literacy and Technology, and 'Hindering'- Education System Based Instability; Health, Emotional Struggles, Rejection and Judgement; Financial, Work and Family Responsibilities; Academic Struggles, Course Design and Delivery; Immigration, Literacy and Cultural Barriers; Lack of Goals, Motivation and Expectations; and Facilities, Classroom and Supplies. In this chapter, theoretical agreement, general findings, implications for counselling theory and practice, limitations and future research will be addressed.

Theoretical Agreement

It is important to highlight the lack of research on males and adult education in the literature. By definition the ECIT research method is exploratory and a lack of support for one or more categories in the literature may mean the study has uncovered some new data not yet known rather than suggesting a category is not sound (Butterfield et al., 2005). In this study, theoretical agreement was not found for all of the categories and this study may have uncovered new information not discussed in the literature. It is important to note that drop outs and returnees (those who dropped out and returned to school) are found to have more in common compared to those who never dropped out (Robertson, 2007). Results from this study were

compared with the research literature on dropouts and second chance system students which include alternative school programs and adult education. The theoretical agreement with previous research and the present categories were:

  <u>Teacher Encouragement, Support and Acceptance.</u> Studies show the experience of continuers and dropouts differ in secondary school. Those who dropped out felt they were not respected, their school was not a friendly place and considered discipline to be handled unfairly (Robertson, 2007). Students who dropped out reported problems with schoolwork and teachers and feelings of 'why bother' as the main reasons they left (Statistics Canada, 2005). Ferguson (2005) described how the experience of a student is inter-relational and an emotional one, and that feeling connected and having relationships based on trust were also identified as being important. Looker and Thiessen (2008) noted second chance programs for 18-20 year old students who returned after dropping out, emphasized flexible student focused learning and close relationships between teachers and students. In this study, every participant stated they felt encouraged, supported and accepted by their teachers and reported these as reasons they continued attending classes in adult education. In addition, participants reported they felt understood as a person including their circumstances and did not feel judged. Participants also spoke about how they felt comfortable to be able to make mistakes and try again in the classroom. It seemed the relationship between participants and teachers was essential for students in adult education. Dynaski and Gleason (1999) stated the choice of teachers is extremely important in alternative schools and Looker and Thiessen (2008) believe the personal characteristics of a teacher are possibly more important than the curriculum. The participants in this study identified more helping incidents of encouragement and support from teachers compared with curriculum delivery which is in step with the research findings.

Course Schedule, Timetable and Flexibility. There is little mentioned around schedule regarding high school students in the literature. In general, high school class schedules tend to be very similar, starting at eight or nine in the morning until three in the afternoon. School district timetables typically offer a semester system or a block system which can have seven courses run in eight blocks throughout the whole year. Thiessen and Looker (2008) explain that alternative schools are designed to assist students who may be experiencing personal, family and social challenges that interfere with their ability to be successful at school. Alternative programs or schools often have smaller, more personal educational settings (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999) and offer flexible year round learning (Martin & Halperin, 2006).

The importance of flexibility in alternative school programs was also identified by participants in this study as being critical. The adult education system offered a varied and flexible schedule of courses at different times for students to choose from. The adult education centre in Vancouver, BC is a large and vibrant system with five locations spread throughout the city with each centre offering a schedule of courses at various term lengths and class frequencies. Participants identified the condensed nine week quarter term allowed them to take one or two classes at a time and reported they were more organized and focused as a result. Class frequency and duration also was a factor. Classes which ran three times per week instead of five meant participants had two days a week to take care of other responsibilities such as work. Participants reported the longer class times of three hours allowed them time for practice and skill acquisition, homework completion and reported condensed terms "didn't waste their time". The majority of participants mentioned flexibility was important so they could take classes which fit their own personal or work schedules. Some participants reported they preferred afternoon classes which allowed them to work or take care of family responsibilities or to sleep in.

The flexible adult education system provides opportunity to choose classes and create a personal timetable, allowing students to organize around their family or work responsibilities and their personal or social obligations so they do not become barriers to accessing education. Adult education also allowed for more flexibility around lateness or leaving early as the responsibility lies with the student and consequences such as being sent to the principal's office are unlikely.

Goals, Motivation and Expectations. Research literature show those who come from homes where parents had completed post-secondary education were more likely to graduate and continue on to post-secondary education (Robertson, 2007). The literature highlights that many students who dropped out did so because they lacked interest, did not see the point of it or had feelings of "why bother" (Statistics Canada, 2005). However, a statistic that may seem surprising and challenge the assumption that dropouts lack the desire to attend post-secondary education found 59% of students who ended up dropping out of high school said they wanted to go on to college or university (Robertson, 2007). In Canada, a study by Bushnik et al. (2004) on returnees, showed drop outs who had postsecondary education aspirations were more likely to return to school. In this study all of the participants identified a goal and were motivated either internally or externally to graduate with an adult diploma, go to college or university and/or improve their chances for better employment opportunities. One participant who lacked motivation to "get a piece of paper from the government", explained that it was only after he attended adult education that he became interested in science which led to him to want to complete his high school diploma in order to reach his goal to attend university. Another participant mentioned he wanted to be the first person in his family to receive a high school diploma and others mentioned they wanted to graduate for their parents. Participants whose second language was English, reported they wanted to improve their English skills in order to

express their thoughts and ideas clearly and go on to work or college. Finally, it may be worth noting that motivation to lift themselves out of poverty and low socioeconomic status may be a factor to attend adult education.

Acceptance and Belonging. Studies shows acceptance and belonging within a peer group are important factors. Those who dropped out of school tended to have socialized with other people with whom shared the same thoughts around the unimportance of school (Robertson, 2007), and peers who valued education can also exert a positive influence (HRDC, 2000a). Participants in this study reflected the diverse demographics of a major urban major city with different cultures, races, religions and languages. The acceptance and belonging reported by the participants largely originated from the recognition they all shared a common goal to better themselves and the lives of their families. Even though many of the students had different ethnic backgrounds they reported feeling united with each other over what they shared in common which was to earn an adult high school diploma.

Stability and Support Systems. Research is consistent in showing those who are of a higher socio-economic status are more likely to graduate (Chuang 1997; de Broucker 2005; Gingras, Bowlby and Pilon 2001; HRDC 2000a). Those who were part of a smaller family (Looker & Thiessen, 2008) and had two parents were also more likely to graduate (Robertson, 2007). Although the living arrangements of participants varied they reported having a support network was important. Some were living on their own, still living with their parents, or were a parent with their own children at home. Spouses of full time adult students had to be the main financial support or take on more responsibilities for the family. Having stable housing was identified as being essential for several participants who explained they were able to focus and

attend school regularly *after* acquiring stable housing. Accessing a professional counsellor, tutor and abstinence from alcohol and drugs were also identified as being important supports.

Autonomy. This study focused solely on the male experience and may have uncovered new data not previously found in the literature and was categorized autonomy. Participants identified independence and autonomy as important factors in their experience. Adult education seemed to provide them with more choice and control and participants reported a much more positive experience for them than in high school. Suh and Suh (2006) alluded to the importance of independence. They found students who dropped out but were independent learners had a higher likelihood of completing high school afterwards. Looker and Thiessen (2008) noted that some dropouts can be seen as resisting the power of the school system. In this study, participants who reported extremely negative experiences in high school identified the most with this category. They spoke of the importance of not feeling like they were being "forced" to do school and being able to "do it on their own" and not "have others prevent me or bother me". Many highlighted the importance of how they could miss classes to take care of responsibilities and be able to catch up afterwards, or skip a class if they knew the material so they didn't get bored and irritated and not be punished for it. It may be interesting to note, studies showed that skipping classes weekly have been identified as a factor which lead to disengagement and dropping out in high school (Robertson, 2007). It may be worth further investigation of how missed classes and the consequences of absenteeism play a role in student disengagement.

In this study, two of the 12 participants identified as being part aboriginal heritage or Metis. Many studies show Aboriginal people are more likely to drop out of high school, however, what is interesting to note is that aboriginal peoples have a higher return rate to alternative school programs and adult education than non-aboriginals and Gilmore (2010) goes

on to state that the reasons for this are worth investigating further. Munns and McFadden (2000) highlight an alternative program for aboriginal youth which recognized the powerlessness students may feel at school and the importance for culturally sensitive interventions to counter the resistance students have developed. Looker and Thiessen (2008) also asked why First Nations youth, visible minorities and immigrants are more likely to return to adult education and highlight the importance of understanding this dynamic before specific policy initiatives can be suggested. It may be worth investigating further what role autonomy plays with males, particularly aboriginal males.

Teacher Curriculum Presentation and Delivery. Research reveals that students in high school tended to leave school because they found the curriculum irrelevant, uninteresting and too hard (Ti Riele, 2000). Looker and Thiessen (2008) further emphasized the level of academic engagement, especially for males, impacted whether they stayed in school or not. In this study, participants spoke how teachers were flexible to their learning needs and provided context to the course content and made it relative, meaningful and interesting. Completing homework in class and a reasonable amount of assignments was mentioned as being helpful. A common theme was how adult education teachers focused on skill acquisition and ensuring the students understood the concepts, compared to their experiences in high school of not understanding and being left behind.

Personal Growth, Maturity and Self Awareness. Studies show that the older people were when they dropped out the more likely they would return. Looker and Thiessen (2008) highlight the consistent and positive impact of how taking senior level math and English courses act as protective factors from dropping out. Raymond (2008) also emphasizes that males are twice as likely to return if they dropped out in grade 12 rather than grade 11 or earlier. Eckstein and

Wolpin (1999) identified those who dropped out later including the last year in high school did not do so because of a lack of academic success but because they had low expectations about the rewards from graduating. In this study, participants reported maturity and increased self-awareness as helpful factors. They reflected that as adults they were able to figure out and become who they were and develop a belief system not influenced by their peers. Those who were able to reflect on their past and learn from their mistakes were able to attend and enjoy classes partly because they had new awareness of what their values and interests were and how to use their strengths. Some reported they benefited from improved self-esteem and self-confidence which helped them return to and stay in adult education. One participant reflected how increased self-awareness led him to the realization that sometimes life presents challenges and that he was not a bad student.

Free and Low Cost. Adult education courses require a twenty dollar registration fee to be paid. All the participants in this study were eligible at the time to take courses tuition free. A variable that has often been associated with not succeeding in school is socio-economic status. Students who were from low socio-economic households were much more at risk of dropping out of school (Chuang, 1997; de Broucker, 1995; Gingras, Bowlby, & Pilon, 2001). Based on the information from their interviews and demographic forms, the majority of the participants seemed to be from low socio-economic households and spoke of the importance of the low registration cost and being provided photocopies of books for free. Those who were on social or income assistance had their registration fee waived. This free or low cost allowed them the opportunity to take all the courses they required to get their adult high school diploma. This was especially evident for English language learners who often started at an English foundations level and worked their way up to English 12 which could take several years to accomplish.

Facilities, Location and Classroom Environment. Dynarski and Gleason (1999) noted that having a general education diploma (GED) or adult education programs located on community college campus seemed to encourage further education. In this study, those who identified proper classrooms and large windows reported feeling like they were in a real school and preferred them over the centres which had small cramped classrooms. The location and proximity of the adult education centres to home or work was important to allow for reduced transportation times and costs for those to drop off or pick up children from school or go to and from work.

Computer Literacy and Technology. Studies show that computers and information communications technology (ICT) courses are positive factors in alternative school programs (Martin & Halperin, 2006). In this study, participants highlighted the importance of computer skills and using google to find information or help them with their English. Participants identified the ICT course and the computer skills they learned as essential for their ongoing learning.

Education System Based Instability. In the adult education system in Vancouver, there was a minimum student enrollment requirement of 19 for classes to run. If the minimum enrollment was not met, then typically the course was cancelled. This policy and procedure may be unique to adult education as little research was found in the literature. In this study, the number one hindering factor reported by participants was the instability experienced from cancelled classes. They reported how they attempted to take courses at other locations which may be offered on different days and times, or wait till the next term to try and take the course again. Participants also reported not having all the courses offered at each centre meant participants had to take courses at other education centres which meant more travel and

inconvenience. As a result, some participants reported they were frustrated and delayed in completing the courses necessary to graduate.

Health, Emotional Struggles, Rejection and Judgement. The majority of drop outs have been impeded by social, economic, and psychological barriers to learning (Martin & Halperin, 2006). Students tend to leave school because they felt alienated and had negative experiences with teachers (Te Riele, 2000) and those who felt estranged from the academic and social lives of their schools participated less in outside activities and were much more likely to drop out (Robertson, 2007). Those who were kicked out of school or sent to the principal's office also had a higher chance of dropping out (Robertson, 2007) and those who repeated a grade may have experienced long term stigma as a deterrent to returning (Chuang, 1997). Dropping out has also been linked to crime, alcohol abuse and illegal drug use as well as health problems (Looker & Thiessen, 2008).

In this study, participants reported they felt misunderstood, frustrated from a lack of communication and isolated and different as a foreigner in society. Participants reflected on past experiences in high school of feeling left behind in class which made them have feelings of rejection and not wanting to return. Looker and Thiessen (2008) found those who had a long term physical, mental or health problem had a higher chance (22%) of dropping out or being a second chance youth compared to those who have never dropped out (5%). Some participants in this study reported medications, medical diagnosis of attention deficit disorder (ADD) or addiction as having negatively impacted their memory, ability to focus and to attend classes.

Financial, Work and Family Responsibilities. Research shows living alone and having a child are related to budget and time constraints which influenced whether people returned to school. Having children increases financial responsibilities on individuals and whether they

decided to stay, leave or return to school depended on the opportunity cost which included the length of time it would take to get a diploma and the potential increased financial benefits from that. This includes individuals who dropped out early without getting Grade 12 courses who were less likely to return to complete their diploma (Raymond, 2008). In this study, participants reported the need to work to pay rent, the high cost of living in Vancouver and how they struggled to balance work and financial constraints while they attended adult education. Some reported they stopped attending school intermittently to look for a job, work full time or take care of family responsibilities. Thiessen and Looker (2008) found that the earlier someone quit school and the longer they had been out of school, the less likely they would return and graduate. In this study, one participant who had been out of school for 20 years stated he was hesitant to return because of the time he was out of school.

Academic Struggles, Course Design and Delivery. Academic achievement has been connected to those who dropped out of high school; however it is important to note not all had poor grades. More than a third had marks of 70% or higher which challenged the assumption that all dropouts have poor grades (Robertson, 2007). Looker and Thiessen (2008) point out that for dropouts and second chance students, it matters as much or more what courses they take and how far they went rather than the grades they achieved. In this study, some but not all participants reported they struggled academically and had difficulty learning math or English in particular. Participants experienced challenges and preferences for both the traditional structured classroom and the self- paced model. Self-paced courses are unique to adult education and have been designed to allow students the flexibility to work independently, do assignments at home and provide the ability to choose when they attend the learning centre for assistance and to write tests. However, for those who felt the self-paced model did not work for them complained it

lacked structure, or lessons were sometimes confusing and they reported they did not have the motivation to complete the work on their own. Only one participant reported he had a negative experience to a specific teaching style which reminded him of his childhood and therefore dropped the course.

Immigration, Literacy and Cultural Barriers. The dropout rate for immigrants is similar among those born in Canada (de Broucker, 2005). For those who do drop out, immigrants and members of visible minorities are more likely to return to the second chance system or adult education (Looker & Thiessen, 2008). Lamb and Rumberger (1999) point out that race and ethnicity are factors which usually reflect the socio-economic status of the particular group. In this study, participants who identified as immigrants described their life as unstable and struggled to find well-paying jobs, which they related to their lack of Canadian qualifications such as a high school diploma and lack of English skills. These participants described the frustration they experienced not being able to express themselves clearly in English and the difficulty and amount of time it takes to acquire the language skills necessary to get a good job or to attend a post-secondary institution. According to Raymond (2008) this would suggest those who attend and invest time and energy in adult education believe a Canadian adult secondary diploma will mean a positive cost benefit for the quality of their lives.

Lack of Goals, Motivation and Expectations. Analysis by Raymond (2008) found a gender gap related to school aspirations. They found that very few factors influenced decisions by females to return to school which suggests women who left school did so because of outside forces rather than personal desire and therefore had motivation to return. Conversely, a male's return to school depended on their labour experience, past academic experience and decisions and finally postsecondary aspirations. A significant determinant for both genders whether they

returned to school or not, was if their absenteeism was considered temporary; which could be assumed with post-secondary aspirations (Raymond, 2008). Eckstein and Wolpin (1999) cite those with low expectations about the benefits from graduating may lead those to drop out even if they are not having academic difficulties. In this study, participants who dropped out of high school reported not being internally or externally motivated to get a high school diploma and lacked career goals or postsecondary aspirations at that time. One participant stated he became interested in science and set a goal of attending postsecondary only after he attended adult education. Those who reported gender based expectations, such as being strong, seemed to experience difficulties around communication and asking for help. Those who expressed expectations that males should be care takers valued working as much or more than school.

Facilities and Classroom Environment. An approach alternative schools use to support students overcome challenges, are smaller class sizes and a more personal educational settings (Dynaski & Gleason, 1992). In this study, those participants who reported small and cramped classrooms felt more self-conscious and had difficulty focusing because of the proximity of other students and lack of space. This illustrates classroom size and composition was a factor in this research.

General Findings

This study focused on those factors which helped and hindered the experience of adult males who returned to school. Eleven helping categories emerged with the category of Teacher Encouragement, Support and Acceptance identified as the most influential with a participation rate of 100% and the most critical incidents at 42, which highlights how influential and essential the role of the teacher is in the experience of males in adult education. In this study, when

participants felt encouraged, understood and accepted by their teachers they were able to fully engage in their learning experience.

The next three categories had an equal participation rate of 83%: Course Schedule, Timetable and Flexibility; Goals, Motivation and Expectations and Acceptance and Belonging. The differences between these categories were the number of critical incidents of 32, 31 and 28 respectively. The life of an adult student can be unpredictable and has many demands balancing work, life and family. Course Schedule, Timetable and Flexibility, spoke to the flexibility built into the schedule and timetable which allowed adult students to organize and choose classes that fit into their personal lives. Depending on their schedule, they were able to take a course in the morning, afternoon or evening and attend class between one and five days a week. Many participants reported how they were organized, interested and able to focus during the nine week quarter terms. This is an important point to consider as studies show males who dropout are reported to be uninterested and disengaged. The importance of Goal Setting, Motivation and Expectations was evident as almost all participants reported having a goal to get their diploma, attend post-secondary or obtain satisfactory employment. It is important to note the participants in this study self-reported having been successful in their courses and their goals seemed to provide the motivation and hope to better improve their standard of life.

The category of Acceptance and Belonging largely reflected the experience participants had in the classroom and how their peers respected and supported each other and the safe emotional environment in class. Participants who attended high school in Canada preferred the more relaxed and accepting atmosphere of adult education and highlighted there were less social expectations to worry about and felt united with their peers. Students represented a diverse demographic group, however participants felt united with their peers and reported they all had a

similar goal to get their education and better their lives. Feeling supported and accepted instead of rejected or judged seemed to be important factor for males to stay in school.

Stability and Support Systems had a participation rate of 75% with 17 critical incidents. It was clear that working and having family obligations while attending school was a challenge. It was vital for participants who had families for their spouses or family members to share or be the primary caretaker or financial income source. Some participants identified adult education as being the source of stability and support in their lives which allowed them to be successful.

There were four categories with an equal participation rate of 67%; Autonomy, Teacher Curriculum Presentation and Delivery; Personal Growth, Maturity and Self Awareness and Free or Low Cost. Autonomy with 25 critical incidents is an intriguing category and not singled out in previous studies. Those who identified autonomy as a critical incident reported they wanted to have control within their education experience. This was particularly evident with those who reported a previous negative high school experience that included academic struggles, difficulty fitting in socially, and embarrassment. They felt the high school system and other factors such as social peer groups, teachers or administrators interfered with their progress and made them feel worse rather than being a help to them. The adult education system seemed to provide an environment that provided them a high internal locus of control which they clearly preferred. Autonomy also seemed to thread through other categories such as the choice around Course Schedule, Timetable and Flexibility, and being able to skip classes without getting into trouble.

The category of Autonomy highlighted those participants in this study felt powerless and a lack of control in the high school system. Therefore, examining ways to improve or change the current system instead of trying to change those who don't fit in the system may be a pragmatic way to propose intervention strategies at both the high school and adult education level. It may

be worth noting many social service and health care agencies have adopted a trauma informed practice model which is designed to minimize barriers and promote a compassionate environment for clients (Ko et al., 2008). This service model also allows clients to retain a sense of power and control in the relationship within the system which may be an area worth exploring further for students who have negative educational experiences.

Teacher Curriculum Presentation and Delivery also had a 67% participation rate with 22 critical incidents and was the other category involving the participant's experience with teachers. How the curriculum and lesson was implemented and the strategies used in the classroom were important for students to learn concepts, especially in math and English. Studies show that when students become disengaged they are more likely to drop out (Robertson, 2007). Participants in this study reported their teachers made the curriculum relevant, interesting and engaging. It is interesting to note how male participants seemed to report it was more important how and why they learned rather than what they were taught.

Personal Growth, Maturity and Self Awareness also with a 67% participation rate, had 18 critical incidents. Those who reflected on past mistakes and experienced insight reported how it contributed to their success in adult education. Participants reflected how increased self-esteem and self-confidence impacted them in a positive way and several participants mentioned that going to a counsellor was helpful in finding out more about who they were and how it was like a new start. Raymond (2008) emphasizes the reasons males drop out of, and return to school are often due to internal factors. This contrasts with the reasons females leave school and return, which tend to be from external factors. There are no counsellor services in the adult education system in Vancouver, BC, however this category highlights the importance of personal growth

and self-awareness and how it should be fostered and supported with male students. Accessible

counselling, groups and guidance services could provide support for males in this important area.

Free or Low Cost category had a participation rate of 67%, and had 15 critical incidents.

Participants identified the low registration fee as important as well as having photocopies

provided for free or textbook deposit waived. Recently, the provincial government announced

reduced funding for adult education students who already hold a high school diploma from

Canada or from another country. It is important to note that many participants were from low

socio-economic status and would likely not be able to take adult education courses if required to

pay the full $425 course fee. Having to pay for courses will likely be a barrier for new Canadians

and permanent residents. Their diploma or credentials are often not recognized in Canada and

therefore they need to start again to get a Canadian adult high school diploma to find meaningful

employment or attend college. This group of adult students are vulnerable as they often have low

English skills and would be required to take multiple English courses in order to improve their

English to be successful in Canada. For many, paying $425 per course is likely not feasible.

Facilities, Location and Classroom Environment had a 50% participation rate with 11

critical incidents. Participants sought and accessed education centres that were close to where

they lived and preferred classrooms that were spacious with natural light and felt like a real

school.

Computer Literacy and Technology had a 33% participation rate and 5 critical incidents.

The importance of this category is likely under represented as many participants use computer

technology to assist them with their school work but did not identify it as a critical category,

possibly because it can be taken for granted for those who are computer literate. Participants who

identified it as critical were appreciative of the skills they learned from taking the ICT computer

course in adult education and reported how essential they were across all courses. Using Google and technology and the internet to learn English or how to do math problems was reported as being necessary to learn when at home and not in school.

Seven categories were identified by males when they expressed what hindered their experience in adult education: Education System Based Instability; Health, Emotional Struggles, Rejection and Judgement; Financial, Work and Family Responsibilities; Academic Struggles, Course Design and Delivery; Immigration, Literacy and Cultural Barriers; Lack of Goals, Motivation and Expectations and Facilities, Classroom and Supplies.

Education System Based Instability had the highest participation rate of 75% with 14 critical incidents in this study. The majority of participants were clear that cancelled classes were the greatest hindrance for them in adult education. Cancelled classes caused them to scramble to other centres or wait until the next semester to take the course they wanted. Participants also reported having to go to multiple locations to register and not being able to register far enough in advance. An online system was suggested to make it easier to register and provide students an opportunity to plan schedules in advance which may aid with the registration process and prevent classes from being cancelled.

Health, Emotional Struggles, Rejection and Judgement had a participation rate of 67% and 29 critical incidents. The life of an adult student seems to be one that is often in transition. Participants were transitioning from teenager to young adulthood, young adult to adult, high school to postsecondary or employment. In addition, many participants were transitioning from recent immigration to becoming more settled in Canadian society. Participants also reported how mental health issues, personal loss and addiction affected their lives negatively and spoke of how they experienced emotions such as anger, frustration and embarrassment. It is likely previous

negative experiences reported by those from high school may hinder males who return to adult education and are triggered from their previous experiences. It also may be worth exploring further how male coping strategies and help-seeking behaviours influence their success in school. Having the opportunity for some male students to process their experiences with a counsellor and learn healthier coping and communication strategies may increase their chance of success in adult education.

Financial, Work and Family Responsibilities had a participation rate of 67% and 19 critical incidents. It was clear many participants had to work while attending adult education even though many indicated they would like to attend school full time. Work and expenses were more of a hindrance because many had to prioritize work in order to pay rent and living expenses. Those who had jobs often were required to work various days and shifts which made them miss classes and sometimes stop coming.

Academic Struggles, Course Design and Delivery had a participation rate of 42% and had 7 critical incidents. A few participants reported having difficulty learning math and those learning English as a second language reported the challenges learning a new language. Participants born in Canada described how they felt misunderstood and unfairly judged while in high school expressing they did want to learn and wanted to be given the opportunity to do so. Some participants reported the self-paced courses did not offer enough structure and ended up not completing them.

Immigration, Literacy and Cultural Barriers had a participation rate of 33% and 12 critical incidents. A large percentage of adult education students in Vancouver have immigrated to Canada. The challenges immigrants experienced revolved around not having their qualifications, including a high school diploma from their country of origin recognized. Not

being able to understand or express themselves in the English language was reported as being very frustrating. A lack of recognized qualifications and a lack of English literacy were barriers and made it difficult for them to find suitable employment. Many of those in this category were hoping to find satisfactory employment after getting their adult high school diploma. This seemed to be a vulnerable population in society and the adult education system provided an invaluable pathway for individuals and their families to enter and progress up the economic ladder in Canadian society.

Lack of Goals, Motivation and Expectations had a participation rate of 33% and 12 critical incidents. Most of the participants had a goal to get their diploma. However, some described not having goals in high school and became motivated to get their diploma only after attending adult education. Some participants expressed the need for males to be strong and be a caretaker which may be related to gender role expectations in society. Some reported not seeing the point of getting a diploma which may be related to not connecting education to future opportunities and outcomes. Motivation, expectations and goals seem important for males and a career counsellor may be effective to support males in this area.

Facilities, Classroom and Supplies had a participation rate of 33% and seven critical incidents. The effect crowded classrooms had on participants was a lack of physical space, increased self- consciousness and a decreased ability to concentrate. This highlights classroom size and composition can be a factor related to the emotional state of students and can hinder their learning experience.

The findings in this study suggest there are a number of factors males find helpful including encouragement, support, flexibility, goal setting, motivation, acceptance and belonging, autonomy and accessibility. The identification of these helping factors and how males

experienced adult education provide a greater understanding of what the most influential factors in keeping males engaged in adult education are. Since there are few studies that have identified what males find helpful while in adult education, the findings in this investigation would be considered significant. To know what allows males to be engaged when they return to school will be useful in education, counselling, policy reform, service design and implementation.

Implications for Theory

This study, which focused on adult males and their experience in adult education had implications with several theories including adult learning theory, client centred theory and transitional theory. Adult learning theory and an andragogical model by Malcolm Knowles identified six principles for adult learning which assumed adults are: internally motivated and self-directed; bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experience; are goal oriented; are relevancy oriented; are practical and like to be respected (Knowles, 1984). Participants in this study reflected the principles related to adult learning theory as being helpful. Client centred theory by Carl Rogers (1956) outlined that "a personal relationship of acceptance, safety, and freedom, where one can dare to explore their perceived world" is the best way for individuals to develop new ways to have their needs met and have their motives fulfilled (p.120). The most important helping factor identified by participants was the personal connection and encouragement from the teachers and their peers. Participants in this study also reported how they experienced transitions in their life while they attended adult education. These expected and unexpected transitions included immigration, cultural, socioeconomic, change in or loss of employment, and moving from adolescence to adult hood. The transition model outlined by

Schlossberg (2011) includes: (a) understanding transitions, (b) coping with transitions, and (c) applying the model to work life transitions, which may be helpful for adult males who have returned to school.

The categories in this investigation can also provide the five identified areas outlined by Robertson (2007) which lead to student disengagement and dropping out, which included: Family orientation; academic achievement; motivation, expectation and perception; acceptance and belonging; and gender with themes specifically identified by adult males in this investigation to help guide the education design and implementation for males in adult education. In this study, the findings can encourage further research to support or deny evidence linked to the adult male's experience of returning to school. The categories identified can also be used to create a model consisting of those helping and hindering categories which have been influential to adult males who returned to school. Finally, this study revealed a category of autonomy, not explored in previous research, as a factor related to the experience of adult males who returned to school and is one which may be worth examining further.

Implications for Practice

This current study offers valuable information for educators, school boards, policy makers, counsellors and other service providers. In particular, the findings will be of importance in a number of areas. First, it will allow educators to be aware of the challenges that exist for males who return to school via the adult education system. Second, educators can take special consideration for the categories which support and help males stay engaged in adult education. Third, the categories can be used by counsellors when working with male students who return to school but are still vulnerable to disengagement or dropping out again. Groups should also be considered. Educators and counsellors can support male students by:

(i)   Offering encouragement to males and allowing for a mentorship role

(ii)   Fostering an environment that is accepting and emotionally safe to make 'mistakes'

(iii) Practicing patience and focusing on skill acquisition and comprehension of academic concepts

(iv)   Practicing acceptance and avoiding shame based communication or feedback

(v)   Practicing positive re-enforcement rather than negative re-enforcement

(vi)   Allowing opportunities for males to catch up when missed classes without passing judgment

(vii) Providing a schedule of courses and timetable which offers flexibility

(viii) Making curriculum and course material relevant, interesting and meaningful

(ix)   Providing career counselling, exploration of values and goals and connect school directly with employment opportunities, including co-operative education

(x)   Incorporate client centred, strength based and motivational interviewing counselling frameworks where appropriate

Findings from this study can be used in the development, design and implementation of an alternative school or adult education program. The findings can help educators, administrators, counsellors and other support staff to further understand, through the male adult student's experiences, what helps and hinders them when they return to school. It may be worth considering how instability from cancelled classes and the importance of emotional health, acceptance, being understood and the role of rejection are factors in the disengagement process

for males. Even though adult male students show a desire to improve their circumstances and complete their adult high school diploma they report struggling to balance education with work and financial obligations.

Limitations

The current study has a number of limitations. First, twelve participants is a limited recruitment size. Although the participants likely represented the adult education student population in Vancouver, demographics such as age, ethnic background, socioeconomic status and previous education experience varies greatly and a small sample size may not reflect the experiences of each demographic group fully. Five of the participants were born in Canada and two participants identified as Metis or having partial aboriginal ethnicity.

Second, the participants in this study were actively attending adult education which eliminated males who may have dropped out of adult education in the past even though they demonstrated a desire to attend adult education. It would be valuable to know what the critical incidents and experiences were for those males who dropped out of adult education.

Lastly, this study recruited participants via posters from three of the five adult education centres in Vancouver. Although many students attend more than one location, it may not reflect fully the adult education student population.

Future Research and Recommendations

Future research ought to focus on the following areas: A longitudinal study looking at adult males who have attended adult education is necessary. More qualitative research is required to understand the factors which influence males and their experience in adult education. This will allow for a more complete picture of how successful completion of adult education actually occurs and an opportunity to evaluate any benefits improved academic upgrading and a diploma

may provide both the individual and society. This is particularly relevant in today's society where continuous upgrading is becoming a requirement to stay competitive. Second, it is essential to try and determine what males consider helped them with their internal processes, emotions, feelings of acceptance and having a sense of independence and autonomy. In this study and other studies, males reported they left high school because they felt they were treated unfairly, were misunderstood and had poor relationships with teachers. It also may be worth exploring how gender based help seeking behaviours and communication influence males in their educational experience. This study found encouragement, support, acceptance and feeling understood were the greatest helping factors while they attended adult education. If future research can determine what leads males to feel rejected, judged, misunderstood, powerless, and have poor relationship with teachers and become disengaged, then maybe there can be progress made around increasing engagement and decreasing the dropout rate for males.

The experience of aboriginal students needs to be explored further. Aboriginal students who dropout have a higher return rate to alternative programs and the adult education system than non- aboriginals. Determining what seems to be helpful for aboriginal adult education students can be implemented in the regular K-12 school system to provide a more culturally sensitive and effective learning environment.

A comparative study on second chance education systems identified Canada as having a higher than average rate of high school graduates due to the varied second chance and adult education systems available to access. It is important to acknowledge by providing a pathway for those who are not successful in the mainstream education system or for new Canadians required out of necessity to acquire qualifications recognized in Canada, just how invaluable an adult high school diploma is to the individual and society as a whole. Studies clearly indicate that crime,

health and socioeconomic outcomes are related to the level of education of a population. As such, it would be wise to maintain the integrity of the second chance and adult education systems currently in place. Indeed, implementing the helpful and protective factors found in the adult education system into the regular school system may allow for more male students to be successful the first time around.

Lastly, the reasons males return to school via the adult education system and stay is not fully understood. Robertson (2007) suggests circumstances which lead young people to make decisions are often rooted in familial, societal and structural dysfunctions. However, it is clear that those who do return demonstrate a desire to be successful. Gender has been identified as a factor for dropping out of school and those without a high school diploma are disadvantaged in society. It is important to highlight for many males the educational system seems to act as a barrier instead of a system to help them and Te Riele (2000) suggests it could be counter-productive to force these people to stay in a school system which is not meeting their needs. In order to reduce the gender gap, examining how the design and implementation of the educational system, which includes counsellors, can better meet the needs of males instead of figuring out how males can fit in the current system, is necessary.

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<p style="text-align:center">Appendices</p>

<p style="text-align:center">Appendix A: Recruitment Letter to School Board</p>

Principal Investigator: Dr. Marvin Westwood, Professor, Ph.D., Department of Counselling Psychology of the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia (UBC)
Co-Investigator: Scott Derganc, MA student, UBC
School: Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education, University of British Columbia
Project Title: What Has Helped and Hindered the Experience of Adult Males Who Returned to School?

Dear [insert name of person/school or school board]:

My name is Scott and I am a second year Masters student in the Counselling Psychology program at the University of British Columbia (UBC). As part of my requirements for a degree in a Masters of Arts, I am conducting a research study on the experiences of returning to school among adult males.

I am contacting you to see if (school/school board) is interested in assisting me to recruit participants for this research project. I would like to interview a minimum of 10 adult male participants between the ages of 19 and 49 who are enrolled or have been recently enrolled in adult education. All participants will be compensated for their time with a $20 gift certificate to Starbucks or Tim Horton's.

If you would like to learn more about my research, I would be happy to meet with you. I have a complete research proposal I am happy to show you as well. I have included a bit of background on whom I am and why I am interested in this research topic and why I think it is important and valuable to the participants and school board. Finally, I have included an outline what participation in the research will entail. Please feel free to contact me for more information.

What this Study is About

The purpose of this study is to learn more about the experiences of males who returned to school and the education system as adults. In order for counsellors, teachers and school administration to support males who return to school, it is important we have a good understanding of what their experiences are. Specifically, what helps them and what hinders them. The majority of academic research has focused on adolescents and have sought their perspectives through surveys and questionnaires. This study on the other hand, will allow adult students the freedom to talk about their experiences and share which parts of their experiences have been most critical. The aim of this study is to give them an opportunity to share their experiences so that we can find out what has helped and what has hindered them so that we can better support them to be successful.

Who is Conducting this Study?

I will be the primary researcher for this study and I will be working under the supervision of Dr. Marvin Westwood at UBC. Currently, I am a second year Master of Arts (MA) student in Counselling Psychology, with a bachelor degree in Education (B.Ed.) and an Honours bachelor degree in Kinesiology (HBK). In addition to my academic training, I have experience working in community agencies with at-risk and homeless youth and teaching in alternative school programs in the U.K., Ontario and in Vancouver, BC. More specifically, I have been a teacher in the adult education system with the Vancouver School Board for the past 7 years where I was involved in developing and teaching courses for a diverse adult student population.

What is and How to be involved?

Interested adult male students can reach me using the contact information included below. Once contacted, I will do a preliminary phone screening to make sure that they are eligible for the project and that they have a clear understanding of what it involves. If we both agree to proceed then they will be invited to meet with me at an adult education centre, community centre, library or at UBC. I will then give him/her a demographic form to fill out and once this is complete, I will conduct an interview which will have an open ended question format which will allow them to share as much about their experiences of being enrolled in school as an adult as they feel comfortable sharing. This interview will last from one hour to two hours depending on how much she/he would like to share. Once the interview data is grouped into categories, a short follow up discussion will take place to allow the participant an opportunity to review the accuracy of the themes he/she expressed during the interview. All participants will receive a $20 gift certificate to be used at Starbucks or Tim Horton's as well as bus tickets to and from the interview if needed.

Dissemination of Information, Consent and the Right to Withdraw:

The information gathered will be included in my final thesis and possibly in additional articles that may be published in academic journals. I am happy to forward a copy of my final findings to you or the school board. The identities of all participants will be kept strictly confidential and will not be revealed on any document. Consent to be part of this research is completely voluntary and participants can stop an interview at any time or not answer an interview question(s). Participants are free to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation.

Contact Information:

Your assistance and support in recruiting participants would be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions or concerns, or would like to speak with me, please contact me at:

Appendix B: Recruitment Poster

Are you a Student in Adult Education?

- ✓ Are you Male between the ages of 19-49?

- ✓ Are you currently enrolled or been enrolled in the last year?

- ✓ Would you like to share what your experience has been like in Adult Education?

- ✓ Would you like to earn a $20 gift card to Starbucks or Tim Horton's?

If you said YES to these questions then you might be eligible to participate in a study in about how males experience returning to school.

What will I have to do if I participate?

After you contact me, we will make sure you are eligible to participate. Then a meeting time will be set up to do an interview so you can share your experiences in Adult Education. This will take between 1 and 2 hours depending how long it takes you to share what you want. After, the information will be put into themes or categories and a short interview will take place so that you can confirm the results of your interview.

Why should I participate?

You will receive a $20 gift card to Starbuck or Tim Horton's! Also, this is your chance to share your experience and tell what has helped you and what has been unhelpful!

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE?

Contact:

Appendix C: Participant Screening Questions

If contacted by potential participants, I will begin by thanking them for taking the time and explain that in order to participate in the study, it is important that I ask them a few questions to make sure they are eligible. All callers will be reminded that all information shared on the phone and throughout the study will be anonymous.

If granted permission, I will ask the following questions:

1. How did you hear about the study?
2. Are you a male?
3. How old are you?
4. Are you a current or recent (within one year) adult education student?
5. Which school are you taking courses at?
6. Have you been successfully completed at least one course in adult education?
7. Would you feel comfortable sharing your experiences in the English language?
8. Would you feel comfortable talking about what has been helpful and difficult for you in adult education?
9. Are you currently experiencing anything stressful that might make it difficult to talk about your experiences?
10. Interviews will range from approximately 45 minutes to 1.5 hours in length depending on how much you would like to share. I will also be contacting you for a follow up short discussion once I have finished analyzing our interview. Is this ok with you?
11. Why do you want to participate in this study?
12. Do you have any questions for me?
13. We will need to organize a time and place to conduct an interview.

UBC The University of British Columbia

**Department of Educational and
Counselling Psychology, and
Special Education**

Title of Study: What Has Helped and Hindered the Experience of Adult Males Who Returned to School?

Principal Investigator: Dr. Marvin Westwood, Professor, Ph.D., Department of Counselling Psychology of the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

Co-Investigator: Scott Derganc, MA student, Department of Counselling Psychology of the Faculty of Education, at the University of British Columbia (UBC).

This research is part of Scott's thesis requirement for completing a Master's of Arts (M.A.) in the Counselling Psychology Program. Upon completion, the thesis will be a public document that can viewed through the UBC library. Contact information:

Why are we doing this research? We are doing this study to learn more about the experiences of adult males after they return to school. We want to learn more about what helps and what hinders males in adult education so that teachers, counsellors and school administrators, can better support them. There is not much research that actually asks males to talk about their experiences in adult education. This study will provide males a chance to share their stories, opinions and points of view.

What happens if you say yes?

If you agree to proceed then you will be invited to meet with me (Scott) at an adult education centre, community centre, library close to you or at UBC. It is important we choose a place that can give us privacy and quiet. I will then give you a demographic form to fill out and once this is complete, I will conduct an interview which will allow you to share as much about your experiences of being enrolled in school as an adult as you would like. I might ask some more questions about your experience so that I can understand as much as possible about your point of view. We might talk about topics such as: classes and homework, teachers, balancing work/home life and school, making new friends, family support and more. I will be taping this interview using an audio digital recorder so that I can analyze it later. This interview will last from one hour to two hours depending on how much she/he would like to talk. After, I will write down what I have learned and then will make a second short appointment with you to talk about what I have found and to make sure you think it is correct. I will make this appointment by email or phone. This will be a much shorter meeting and can take place over the phone if more convenient.

All participants will receive a $20 gift certificate to be used at Starbucks or Tim Horton's as well as bus tickets to and from the interviews if needed.

What will be done with the study results? The information shared during the interview will be analyzed and used for a final research project that is part of my program at UBC. I may also share this information as meetings and conferences, and it may be published in academic journals or magazines for other people to read. However, your name will not be mentioned in any of these papers, articles or presentations.

Potential Risks: We do not think that there is anything in this study that could be harmful or be bad for you. There might be some questions or topics that might feel uncomfortable talking about, so we will make sure that you know you don't have to talk about anything you don't want to. Also, you are free to end the interview at any time. If something comes up during our interview that you need more support with, we will give you a list of community resources that you can go to for support.

Potential Benefits: By being part of this study, you will get the chance to talk about your experiences in safe and welcoming environment. You will also get the chance to have your opinions heard, which will help teachers, counsellors and school administrators better understand how to support adult students.

Confidentiality: All the information collected in this study that is related to your identity will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone without getting your permission first. All the audio recordings and written documents that relate to the interview will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. We will be typing out the interviews that take place and these documents will be saved on a computer that is protected by a password. Your name will not be written on these documents. We will replace your name with a number or pseudonym. The information that we get during the interview will not be accessible to anyone else. It is the policy of UBC that after five years, all data will be destroyed.

There are three exceptions which confidentiality cannot be maintained: 1) If there is reason to suspect physical, mental or sexual child abuse; 2) If there si serious risk of suicide and/or self harm and 3) If the participant presents a clear and imminent threat to someone else or society. If at any point we assess any of these three situations, further action will be taken, which may include contacting emergency services, the Ministry of Children and Family Development and counselling support services. If this situation arises, participants will be informed and will be given the option of using these services themselves with the support of the researcher.

Compensation of Participating: In return for the time spent participating in this study, you will receive a $20 gift card to spend at Starbucks or Tim Horton's and bus tickets for travel to and from the interview.

Contact for Information about the Study: If you have questions about the study, please feel free to use the contact information provided.

Contact for Concerns about the Rights of Research Participants: If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please feel free to contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of the Research Services at 604-822-8598 or 1-877-822-8598 or by email RSIL@ors.ubc.ca.

Consent and Right to Withdraw: Consent to be part of this research study is completely voluntary. This means you have the choice to decide if you want to be a part of it or not. You can withdraw or end your involvement at any time with no explanation or consequences. You also have the right not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You can also take a break at any time during the interview. Finally, the researcher (Scott) also has the right to withdraw you from the study if circumstances necessitate.

Signature of Participant:

I understand the information provided on this consent form for the study: *What Has Helped and Hindered the Experience of Adult Males Who Returned to School?*

Signing below indicates that you give your consent and received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

_____   _____

Participant Signature   Date

_____

Print Name

Signature of Researcher: These are the terms which I will conduct research

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   Date

Appendix E: Demographics Form

Please answer the following questions by filling in the blank sections and circling answers. If you need any help, please ask the researcher. If you do not wish to answer some questions you can leave them blank. All information provided will be kept confidential. Thank you for participating!

1. How old are you: _____

2. What country were you born: _____

3. What is your ethnicity (Ex: Aboriginal/Chinese/South Asian/Caucasian): _____

4. How many years have you lived in Canada: _____

5. What is your first language spoken: _____

6. What is your second language spoken (if applicable): _____

7. How many years have you spoken English: _____

8. What was the highest level of school that you achieved? Grade/Level: _____

9. Did you graduate from a high school in Canada: Yes / No

10. How many years have you been taking courses in Adult Education: _____

11. What course(s) did you take this year or recently (include the level/grade):

                    i.   _____

                   ii.   _____

                 iii.   _____

12. What is your goal: Get a job / High School Diploma / College / University

    Other or Specific goal/course: _____

13. Financial status: Working / EI / Unemployed / Social Assistance / Other: _____