BEING OPEN TO POSSIBILITIES:
DEVELOPING A LIBERATORY PRACTICE IN ADULT SPECIAL EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

Action research was conducted in a college setting with adult special education students while seeking to answer the question: What do these students really need to know in order to be employable?

This paper examines and reflects upon critical incidents, journal writing, transcriptions of video sessions and documents of the time involving students and colleagues over a period of six years. Using perspectives from counselling psychology, curriculum theory, and action research six themes emerge as recurring focal points of reflection and change: communication, behavior, patterns, roles, relationships, and structure.

Research is concluded through three levels of reflection on person, problem and method. The teacher/researcher moves from a perspective of "doing to students" to one of "being with students" (responsive teaching). It is suggested that Adult Special Education students need to gain an understanding of themselves as learners and as social beings within a social context. Action research methodology became the teaching methodology.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Introduction

What follows draws upon six years of an action research process I engaged in as an Adult Special Education Instructor in a College setting. This account of my practice is an evolving story which began intuitively with the question: What do these students really need to know in order to be employable? This question marked the beginning of a constant question/action spiral which has become central in my practice. Shaped through critical incidents, autobiography, theories, and personal inquiry I now hold a strong belief that Adult Special Education Instructors are in an incredibly powerful position from which to effect change, but have been focusing on the wrong aspects of the curriculum. In fact, I have a suspicion that the things that we as instructors are unaware of, may be what affect these students the most. In the writing of this paper I intend to reframe and question some commonly held beliefs and assumptions about persons with special needs, about how and what to teach them, and whether we are really teaching what we think we are.
Am I Teaching What I Think I Am?

In the summer of 1994, I took a course with Dr. Ted Aoki during which we were asked to keep a journal. Beginning with the topic of myself as a university student, I described an experience of moving from one class to another, feeling like I was caught amidst a contradiction. In one class I was totally involved, actively participating in lengthy discussions which offered many perspectives and insights. In contrast my next class was quite the opposite. From my back row seat I often had the sense that what was being taught verbally and what was being taught non-verbally did not match; a message that said, do as I say but not as I do. I felt disconnected and disinterested. I went on to write about my feelings of frustration around saying nothing about what I was experiencing as rather a deadly classroom. This decision arose from a sense that my opinion would not be well received.

I wrote of tension between myself and others, something I had felt a lot of over the years and which had been particularly high again of late. Since beginning my Masters program I had felt more and more removed from friends, family and co-workers. I felt pushed away by comments that
categorized me as too smart, and not understandable to
others. Ted underlined one of my comments which said,
"people fear what they do not understand."

I went on to describe a sense of freedom for me as being
away from watchful, judgmental eyes. Freedom means doing
what needs to be done, to follow your own interest or need,
and to be creative when nobody is watching.

I included a description of driving through a tunnel
where even the lanes are separated with barriers. This
creates for me a very uncomfortable feeling, a sense of
feeling trapped, unable to function as I normally do. Ted
responded with, "constrained in the narrow space between."

My next entry says much about me, which until now I have
chosen to ignore. I wrote:

On Friday the article from the Call of Teaching had two
points that rang particularly true for me as a teacher of
adult special education. I have often over the past year
questioned my influence, involvement on a personal human
level with my students and how this impacts on their
ability to achieve a sense of independence for
themselves. I spoke in class of what my Instructor last
summer referred to as a "dance" between two individuals
and have been experimenting with this notion by purposely
changing my part of the dance. Don Cassel in his paper
identified this somewhat when he referred to feeling that
he himself might be the cause of the problem. He also
speaks of a fear to write because he can't hear the voice
of his students above his own. Is he afraid to hear his
own voice? How can he know his students if he doesn't
know himself? It has been my experience that most people
do hide from themselves and that unknowingly they affect others, trying to protect themselves by putting blame on someone or something else and avoid looking at themselves.

Ted underlined the following:

achieve a sense of independence for themselves
my part of the dance
he himself might be the cause of the problem
hide from themselves
avoid looking at themselves

Writing about this writing, I went on to comment:

"Dancing"

This raises the question that if we spend a lot of time hiding and avoiding looking at and accepting ourselves as we are, how does this influence our ability to teach, our students' ability to learn, our ability to use what we have learned ... our ability to function in the world?

Ted responded with these two questions.

Could there be always an unknowable stranger within a self?

The other self?

At the time of my summer course in 1994 I chose to avoid what now seems the most obvious to pursue "my other self". Instead I chose to focus on the questions which took me back to one of my students who having a diagnosis of schizophrenia had a much more obvious other to pursue.
It was easier to look at another rather than myself. I have since come back to look at my issues, as yet unresolved. It was my sense that during the fifth year of the program my past had begun creeping into my work environment making it progressively more difficult to be who I chose to be. Heavy business demands on the program and personal projects had increased the levels of stress for both students and instructors. The result of the latter being that myself and many of those connected with the program began to return to past ways of coping, past ways of being, unproductive roles.

Avoiding myself, I proceeded to write in my journal some descriptions of working with a student named Crystal.

I have on several occasions watched her move from being emotionally distraught, hunched over and avoiding eye contact into a witty, creative, spontaneous individual in the space of a twenty minute conversation with me.

Ted commented, "seems to say much about spaces for others you create." This statement motivated my next entry which was about Joe.

He could do very routine sets of tasks and could assimilate new tasks if added slowly to his routine. He was mechanical in his social interactions, his understanding being very literal.
Ted circled "being very literal", and at the end of this entry which further went on to offer descriptions of Joe's training to be a waiter, he wrote:

I feel a shift in language --- I sensed the language in the earlier submission touched with the language of lived experiences whereas the stories of Joe seemed to be couched in the language of objectivity.

Startled by the realization that I had indeed used different language when speaking about two of my students, I began to seek the reason for the difference by comparing the words that I had chosen to use in my writing.

With Crystal I had used words such as "witty", "creative", and "spontaneous." These words are for me signs of having no preconceived notion of what to expect. On the other hand, for Joe I used "slowly, mechanical, routine;" words having the flavor of linearity and predictability.

My writing about Crystal was shifting back and forth from Crystal to me and back again, but what jumped off the page at me was the reoccurring use of the word "with." I had used it five times in a journal entry that was less than a page long. What did "with" mean? What does experiencing life "with" Crystal mean?

Returning to my writing about Joe I had made reference to "he did this" or "he did that," with reference to myself
taking the form of our and we. What was I protecting myself from that I felt the need to become a we?

As I was trying to sleep one night, I had a vividly clear picture of my writing about Joe which moved to focus on the words "being very literal." What occurred to me was that what I had left out of my description of Crystal was that the wittiness, creativeness, and spontaneity were to a large degree about her use of language. Did the difference have something to do with being "literate" as opposed to "literal"? Language, literate, and literal?

I found myself thinking about my present experiences of being a student and of my struggles with language and understanding language, and thinking that too much emphasis was on language. But was it? What had begun to happen for me as I reflected and pursued a deeper understanding of what I had written was an awareness that all of my journalizing was somehow interlinked. My experiences of being a student in one class could easily have mirrored my experiences of being with Crystal; only in one I am the student, the other the teacher. My first journal entry about being caught in a contradiction, could I have been doing this to Joe? I also became aware of all of the shifting back and forth in my mind as I had been writing. Back and forth between Crystal and Joe, back and forth between the classes I had been
taking at the time, past to present, student to teacher and I had also brought in to a small degree an other in myself.

What does all of this have to do with being a teacher and being a student?

What does all of this have to do with my understanding of being a teacher and being a student?

**Developing a "Training" Program.**

Presently in the college system there are a number of students who are being referred to as "students who fall between the cracks." These students have labels describing such difficulties as learning disability, dyslexia, schizophrenia, fetal alcohol syndrome, emotional difficulties, behavioral difficulties, head injury, mild or moderate intellectual impairment, attention deficit disorder.

Six years ago I was hired to develop and then implement a new program for the above mentioned student population. In addition to the standard curriculum of life skills and basic academics this program was to provide vocational training to prepare students for entry level positions in the food service industry.

Prior to my appointment, the Coordinator of Developmental Studies had been in negotiation with a local Senior Citizens Group. As a result, this program was to be
in partnership with the Seniors' Centre, with the expectation that our students would prepare a soup and sandwich lunch three days a week. This was to be done in the Seniors' kitchen, located in the basement of the same building as the College. In addition we would also run a coffee concession for students on our campus.

Having previously worked in large institutional settings, my initial assumption was that these students would function at a low academic level, but would be able to learn the skills necessary to gain employment. Teaching them would require lots of supervision and repetition of tasks as they would learn more slowly than the normal population. Having visited some Adult Special Education Programs in the Vancouver area, I envisioned students performing such jobs as making coffee, washing dishes, preparing vegetables for soup, making sandwiches, setting tables, and other such duties.

Instructional staff consisting of myself as Instructor and an Instructional Aide would provide close supervision and likely be responsible for most of the actual cooking and handling of money. My focus would be on classroom instruction and the running of the coffee concession, while the aide, whose expertise was to be in food service, would take responsibility for the kitchen activities in the Seniors' Centre.
In classroom sessions students would focus on building a knowledge base with respect to restaurant jobs, house rules, shopping, basic reading and mathematics. They would learn the terminology used for cooking and in restaurants.

Each student would have an individual education plan that would identify their strengths and needs. Plans would reflect what the instructional staff viewed as necessary for students to learn as stepping stones toward the goal of employment. A task analysis would be done on each job, and this analysis would be used to teach all students in the same manner to avoid confusion.

Some thirteen years ago when working with patients in a institutional setting for the mentally handicapped I had become quite comfortable with the use of some behavior modification techniques which had proven successful in prevocational training. I hadn't really thought about it when I began working on this program, but my decision to do task analysis of jobs, teach everyone the same way, and deal with unacceptable behavior using consequences had come from this experience. In addition, visits to other programs to see what they were doing had allowed me to easily accept this mode of practice as still being the best. I thereby gratefully accepted copies of already established curriculum to use with my students. Why re-invent the wheel? Then
with the help of my teaching assistant Simon, we downgraded some of the Cooks' Training Curriculum to cover anything that we felt was missing.

In an article by Kliebard (1992) there is a brief outline of Ralph Tyler's Rationale. It reads:

Tyler's rationale revolves around four central questions which Tyler feels need answers if the process of curriculum development is to proceed:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (p.153)

Having addressed the first three of the above; 1) the purpose being to attain the skills necessary to gain entry level positions in the food service industry; 2) the experiences, to be hands on training in a restaurant kitchen augmented with classroom sessions; and 3) the organization to be very step by step, beginning with the simplest tasks and slowly progressing to the most difficult, we accepted students and began training.
CHAPTER TWO

TRAINING

What does "Training" Look like?

During the first year of the program we were known as the Transitional Training class. A name which had been in use for several years and implied that those in the program were not yet ready for a regular college program or to go to work. We had about thirteen to fifteen students in the program for most of the year. Student hours varied with most being part-time ranging from six to twenty-four hours per week. The disabilities of the students were mostly learning difficulties, with two wheelchair bound (with multiple handicaps), one head injury, one moderately handicapped and one autistic. I ran the concession and classroom activities on the second floor of the building five days a week, having contact with all of the students to some degree. Simon worked with approximately four to five students three days a week to run a cafeteria style soup and sandwich lunch in the Seniors' Centre, located in the basement.
The program, the students and the instructional staff were all disconnected from one another. As a result little contact or discussions occurred between Simon and myself. We rarely saw what the other was doing and only worked together one to two hours a week.

Much of my day was spent either teaching basic mathematics, reading, writing, life skills (time management, money management, communication skills, personal hygiene) or vocational skills related to the running of the concession. Simon focused on food safe, cooking theory, and cooks training.

For me, classroom activities had proven the most difficult to teach. During basic mathematics and reading comprehension lessons students would not work independently for any length of time without constant coaxing and assistance. In the end I was teaching one to one lessons, with each student working on something different. When they got stuck or had finished what they were working on they either sat there or called for my assistance. I moved frantically from one student to the other trying to keep them all busy. As the year progressed attendance became erratic, which only added to the confusion that existed as a result of students being part-time and having different schedules. When I wanted to teach something to a group in
life skills, two or three students would be away. I would then have to teach it again, only this time two or three other students were away.

In contrast to the classroom activities were the kitchen activities. Here students seemed to enjoy the hands on tasks of stocking the concession, shopping, baking, wrapping, being cashier, and counting money for the bank deposit. They would work independently for short periods of time, showing signs of greater interest in doing well.

However, it was a challenge to include all of the students in kitchen activities due to the mobility levels of several students (two physically disabled and two in wheelchairs). A suggestion of a head switch to turn on a coffee pot from SET BC as a way to involve one of our wheelchair people (who was also non-verbal) to me just didn't seem a productive use of his time or ours. It also raised questions of safety around the blockage of aisle space and the potential for accidents that exist in a kitchen (for example knives, hot liquids, hot pots and equipment) even for able bodied students when several people are in a kitchen at the same time.

A thought that remains with me from this time was my sense of a discrepancy between what I had upon several occasions felt was of interest and motivating to students
versus what their parents, advocates or even myself wanted them to do. I had occasionally noticed a smile, a glint in the eye, or a willingness to do jobs which took some students out of the college setting, while they appeared lifeless and unmotivated on tasks that kept them in the classroom. There was a willingness to do hands on kitchen activities in contrast to what felt like the dread of a teeth pulling operation for the classroom activities. I began to wonder about doing classroom work and whether this was the best way to teach my students. I also questioned the appropriateness of this program for individuals who were quite physically handicapped. I recall having thought that being in college seemed for one student more the need of his parents than his own.

This wasn't the first time such a thought had occurred to me. It was reminiscent of a time several years ago when handicapped individuals who had previously lived in institutions were making statements about being happier living in the community. They were now able to do what others did and could have a normal life. For me this had always raised two questions:

What is normal?

Are these words really this individual's words or are they saying them to please someone else?
Looking towards next year I began to think that some entrance criteria targeting students who would be physically able to partake actively and safely in a kitchen setting might be warranted. I also felt that we needed to do more of what had worked the best for our students, the hands on training aspects of the program.

As Simon had previously been a sous chef and possessed a wealth of knowledge and experience in the area of food service, after some discussions, we decided to request a shift in the hours we had begun with. I would give some of my time to Simon, which would allow the soup and sandwich lunch to expand to five days a week. In addition seeking to alleviate the disjointed times and disconnectedness that had existed, all students would have the same hours. We also requested access to classroom space in or near the Seniors' Centre, so that we would all be located together. That way most of the program activities would occur in the same area except for the student concession which would remain on the second floor.

At the end of our first year I spent a few days cleaning out my office. When the program began I had inherited a lot of curriculum materials which I had kept in case I should need them. As the program was now leaning heavily towards rather specific vocational training, I began to weed out anything that was not really applicable to this end.
Is there a Difference between "Transitional Training" and "Food Service Worker"?

In our second year we changed the name of the program to Food Service Worker, a change which to us implied our desire to no longer be seen as a program for special students, but rather a regular program where students are being trained to be restaurant workers. All of the students were now full-time (30 hours a week). We had seat service for our customers and in addition to the daily soup and sandwich there was also a special. Kitchen workers dressed in whites, with servers being distinguishable in their peach colored shirts with name tags. We were beginning to look and function like a real restaurant.

By October we had nine students who stayed with us for the year. Of these, most were considered learning disabled, with one autistic and two in the mild to moderate range of mentally handicapped.

Near month end, Kevin one of our better students was diagnosed with a serious illness. We all felt terrible for him.

Sensing that he had a need to still come and be part of the program I negotiated with Social Services and the College to allow him to stay on as a part-time student and
attend when he was able. He stayed with us until the end of the year, often managing only a few hours a week, his determination and commitment never ceasing to amaze me. He had incredible strength to go on, much more than most people could have done.

Early in the year I remember an incident with Joe, a student who functioned at quite a low level. He had been washing dishes for several days retaining some behavior which I saw as unproductive. He would ask other students and staff where items should be put away even though he already knew. He would wash the dishes so slowly that others would be asked to help him.

After taking a closer look at the situation, what he seemed to be gaining from this behavior was a lot of attention from staff and students. Calling him from the kitchen, I proceeded to tell him about what I perceived him to be doing. I explained that this was not acceptable behavior and that it certainly wouldn't be acceptable in a job situation. I then informed him that should he choose to do either of these things again, that I would send him to the classroom to work on something all by himself. To my amazement, he rarely did this again. When he did start to slow down I reminded him of what we had discussed and he sped up. For someone who was operating at such a low
functional level I had not expected such an immediate change in his behavior.

Involvement with another student, Samantha, also proved to be quite significant. When we accepted her into the program, she appeared to operate at quite a high level. She had some difficulties academically, but seemed to learn in the kitchen setting quite quickly. My assumption was that she would have no difficulty working through the program and eventually securing a job in a restaurant.

As time passed she was able to handle a lot of the planning and cooking duties. However, what she also began to do, with regularity, was to tell us about personal difficulties (fear of pregnancy, abusive boyfriends, family members being seriously injured), to injure herself (peeled her finger with a potato peeler, put her foot through the lid of a bucket of hot soup, fell on some ice outside and ended up on crutches), or to claim to have injured herself arriving with an elastic bandage around her wrist and hand. Over the course of the year as she moved from one personal crisis to another, we met on numerous occasions upon which I listened, questioned for clarification, and reflected back to her. This seemed to have the effect of calming her so that she was eventually able to resume her work.
These were the beginnings of my role as counselor. Not only with Joe and Samantha, but with almost all of my students I began having one to one meetings to discuss both school and personal difficulties they may be having.

Classroom sessions were short and relevant to the hands on experiences of the restaurant. Students worked hard and finished several of the modules that I had constructed for them on restaurant jobs, restaurant terminology, reading recipes, and basic mathematics skills.

After marking a multiple choice test about restaurant jobs, I recall thinking that it was obvious from the answers which job a student had been trained on. The answers relating to their job were always right while an understanding of the other jobs was often unclear. It seemed that students were better at articulating what they had learned if they actually experienced what we had been trying to teach them.

If a student's understanding is better when they actually experience a job, then it made sense to allow them to do different jobs. Therefore, not long after this realization, and flying in the face of a commonly held belief that handicapped individuals don't handle change
well, we began to have students change jobs, no longer training them for just one.

Once our students got over the initial apprehension of something new, most of them handled the shifting of jobs very well. Several of them proved to be quite flexible and able to change quite easily. Students began to work both in the kitchen and in the restaurant. I began to wonder ... who then is resistive to change?

As time went on a kind of camaraderie started to form between the students. This was contrary to my experience where special needs individuals more often attempted to socialize with teachers or advocates, making limited or few attempts with one another without assistance to do so.

Five months into the first semester, the students feeling quite competent, expressed a desire to prepare for the lunch service on their own. As we viewed their level of skill to be quite high, we complied with their wishes and left them to prepare for lunch.

When we returned about thirty minutes before service time, we found that the students were very involved in preparing the special of the day, Pizza. However, that was the only thing they were preparing. The other aspects of
the menu, the soup and sandwich of the day, had been forgotten.

For me as an instructor, I was left with the impression that although these students seemed quite competent and possessed quite high level skills, something wasn't working.

A month or so later, Simon was away, leaving me in charge of the kitchen activities for the day. Having a plan of what was to occur, I watched to see if the students were able to follow through without my assistance. They did quite well, with most of my prompting occurring around my awareness of the time when things needed to be complete. I came away from this experience with a suspicion, that these students had very little awareness of time.

Pursuing this in a classroom session, students were asked to identify how long it took to make soup, mash potatoes, cook carrots, prepare egg salad; all the things they had been doing under our supervision for several months, on a day to day or week to week basis. What I discovered was that they did not know the answers. That in fact, several of the students did not know how to read a clock or understand the terms used in reference to a clock. What I had assumed about these students and about what I
needed to teach them in order to make them employable, needed some adjustment.

Initially, I was shocked by this lack of time awareness. But as I thought about it, I began to wonder when would they have ever needed to know. In school the bell rings signaling when it is time to start, change classes, have lunch or go home. Parents make sure they are up, fed, dressed and delivered to school. Bells and people are important, not time.

At this point one thing was obvious, they needed to know how to plan. Planning to me meant identifying jobs that needed to be done, being able to estimate how much time was needed to do these jobs, to prioritize them; and when this was all done, to make a written plan or schedule to use as a guide to accomplish the tasks. The development of some effective communication skills, such as what to ask, how to ask, and of whom to ask it, also seemed an appropriate goal.

Armed with these new learning objectives we began teaching students how to read clocks, to look at the clock before and after completing a job, to note the time that had passed, and to relate this to planning. We asked students to look at their working space and tell us what they saw. We let them experience what it was like if their choices
worked, or if they did not. Based on what they had experienced, we asked them what they might choose to do differently the next time. If they didn't know an answer, to identify what they needed to ask, of who they should ask it, and actually follow through and do that.

It was about this time that we gained our incredibly dedicated volunteer, Jean, a mature Adult Basic Education student who had previously done tutoring in a work study position. She had expressed an interest in doing something similar in our program saying that she felt a kind of kinship with the students as she had also struggled through school. She indicated that listening to me teach sounded similar to the way her mother had encouraged her when she was a girl. Unfortunately, we did not have a work study position for her.

A short while later she became a job coach for a supported work client who was training in our program. When this situation ended, she stayed on as a volunteer during lunch sessions until she completed her General Education Diploma. It was then she began assisting in all aspects of the program putting in many hours of her time each week.

Jean became my window to how students were doing, might interpret, or feel with respect to things that occurred in the program. Surprisingly, she often commented that many of
the things I asked, like; What she saw? What she felt? or What she thought?, had never been asked of her before. She often had difficulty answering, but when she did, her responses proved to be incredibly insightful, providing a vital link between instructional staff and students.

Our instructional roles were changing significantly. Rather than giving instructions on what should be done, Simon, Jean and myself asked questions, with the expectation that our students, think, evaluate, and suggest change. What we expected, we started to get. Our students began taking responsibility for their own learning.

As year end approached things seemed to have gone very well. I had discovered our students' inability to tell or relate to time. Our students needed to learn how to plan and we needed to learn how to stand back and let them do it. One to one interviews was an effective way to keep students focused on their work and their training. And resulting from incidents with students that hadn't turned out quite the way I would have expected, I was now a little less definite in my judgments of student capabilities and a little more open to see things that I may not have noticed before.
Looking to the next year I somehow knew that the ability to function effectively as a group was an important factor in the success we were experiencing. Therefore, I felt that some new components which would address this issue should be added to the entrance criteria. As a result we added a three to five day assessment for anyone interested in the program. What this meant was that potential students were required to perform as a working member of the class for several days. During this time we were able to get a good indication of whether students were making choices for themselves or somebody else had sent them. It also provided an opportunity to see how a student might fit into the program, and what functional levels of mathematics, reading, writing and vocational skills they possessed. Then upon completion of the assessment period, a written report was prepared identifying what had occurred and giving recommendations for either application to the program or what would need to be improved in order to become eligible at a later date. Potential students were then able to make informed decisions based on their experience of being in the program, our perceptions (Simon, Jean and myself) of how they did, and whether they themselves liked it or not.

For me the only other aspect of concern was with respect to program hours. It had been difficult covering student activities effectively for the thirty hours a week of
student contact time with both Simon and myself working part-time. In addition, similar to the previous year, we once again had a substantial decrease in the number of students still attending the program during the last few weeks, making this time rather unproductive. Therefore, we proposed another change for the following year. We would work the same number of hours only in a shorter time frame, nine months instead of ten. This would allow us to capitalize on the times when more students were in the program. It would also provide more contact time per week with students and more overlap time for instructional staff to work together.

In June I spent several hours cleaning out my office and classroom still located on the second floor of the building. Next year we were going to have our own classroom down the hall from the Seniors' Centre. Not wanting to move anything that wasn't needed, I once again found myself weeding out curriculum materials that I had not used in the program. What I moved to my new classroom was now one third of the original amount that I had begun with.

Reflections

My recollections of the first two years as I write them in greater detail reflect very much me and my decisions with
respect to the structure of the program. How to make the best use of time for students and instructional staff? What motivates students to learn? What content do they need to learn? It was for the most part a very one sided affair. I was set on my own agenda of making the program run well; having good attendance, motivating students, and selecting content that was easy and productive to teach if you used the right methods. In addition I sought to effectively document our work with assessment forms, progress notes, vocational skills check lists, Independent Education Plans, and attendance records as verification of what we were doing.

I was doing everything my teacher training and my own personal experiences of school had taught me. The how and what of teaching were my priority. Like Tyler's rationale the importance of who the students are was somehow lacking. Likewise, Simon had been attending to his agenda, that of running a good restaurant, one that was clean, had good food, and good service.

Whose needs are we really meeting when we don't intimately know the students we are supposedly planning for? Control, documentation, objectives and goals are issues of the school and of teachers, not necessarily the students they teach.
I find it much more difficult to recall specific instances about students in these first few years, who they were as people, and how they did their work except for the latter part of the second year when after several critical incidents my thinking was beginning to shift.

I was amazed by Kevin's tenacity to continue in the program even though he was so sick. To look at him, even when he was well, he was a very small slender man and yet in contrast to his appearance, he had demonstrated more strength than I ever would have expected from him. Joe presented as someone with quite low functional abilities, yet, he ceased doing what I perceived as unproductive behavior after one discussion. A discussion in which I identified for him that I saw his behavior as attention seeking and not appropriate for a work site. The incident when students were making pizza, which made me look more closely at what students were really doing, leading to an awareness that I was providing the timing cues instead of the clock.

Gordon Wells (1994) in Changing Schools from Within: Creating Communities of Inquiry speaks of critical incidents as being:

... occasions when something unexpected led me to look
more closely at my assumptions and, by reflecting on what I was doing and why, to arrive at a deeper understanding of the complex of motives, beliefs and attitudes that influences my practice on particular occasions. (p.273)

It seems that to some degree I had begun to engage in just such a process.

Things had generally been moving towards being the way I had intended them to be. The students were progressing and the next step which seemed realistically attainable was that our students would now go on to get jobs. Or so I thought...
CHAPTER THREE

SOME EMERGING THEMES

Communication, Behavior and Patterns

In our third year the business in the restaurant was increasing, and along with it the need to work together. However, the increased work load brought increased stress and many conflictive situations began to occur between students. My role of counselor began taking more of my time.

In addition to biweekly meetings with each student, I spent much of my time observing and capitalizing on teachable moments as communication difficulties occurred during the regular workings of the program. Was that an I, or a you message? Who owns the problem? These were commonly asked questions during the course of a day.

We also began holding regular evaluation sessions, something which I borrowed from Instructional Skills Facilitator Training. My objective was that students learn to identify what was happening in the restaurant without finger pointing at one another. Students were asked to look at their production as a group by describing the behavior of themselves and others in terms of what had worked well and what had not. We then sought their suggestions of how it
could be done differently and more productively the next time.

Their awareness of where things went wrong and how to change them the next time, grew. What was most often identified as being a major difficulty was the lack of a good planning sheet or poor communication between students.

I recall one lunch session that was particularly chaotic. As the next day's preparation and clean-up began, one of the second year students stated quite loudly, "I can't stand it, I'm going to the classroom to do a planning sheet!" I could only smile.

I began to hold more formal classroom sessions on communication, dealing with such subjects as I and You messages; assertive, aggressive, and passive behavior; family values; self esteem.

There were class sessions where I had students practice describing the behavior of others. Students would be asked to watch as Simon or I would perform some activity such as carrying a tray, moving a table, or sitting in a chair; and to then describe the actions and facial expressions. On other occasions students might be asked to work in a group to perform a task while others would be assigned to watch and record their actions. We would then talk about how that behavior might be seen and what it might mean. What came out of these sessions was an awareness that there are often
many possibilities and that one could only guess. You had to ask to be sure.

It was about this time that I became aware of the effect that a why question had on my students. It was like throwing up a road block in front of them. Almost every time, and with every student, if a question began with why they did not respond. Questions that I began with how, when, what or where however, were almost always met with some attempt at an answer. Sharing this information with Simon and Jean we all began making conscious efforts to not use the word why.

What stands out vividly from this year was the laughter. Everything we did was fun, exciting. We could laugh at the mistakes, we could laugh at ourselves.

Student behavior had changed significantly. During kitchen sessions most of the work was now being done by the students with very little prompting on the part of instructors. Student participation during classroom sessions increased considerably. They often requested more mathematics practice or to have a communication session. Students also began socializing with one another outside of class. They would phone each other and often organize a night out. As a way of checking to see if the skills
students were learning would transfer into an employment situation, we had occasionally begun placing students on work experience in the community.

Being in full-time attendance and having recently received a clean bill of health, Kevin was the first to do a work experience at a local restaurant. After several weeks of doing quite well, he was retained as a dishwasher and prep cook in a supported work situation. When the time period for the supported work was up, we received the feedback that there had been some problems regarding food sanitation practices and that the quality of his work was just not good enough to keep him on, when they would have to pay the full wage.

At this point, we took him back into the program and continued working on his skill level and reviewing some things that seemed to have been forgotten. Several months went by with not a lot of progress. Simon, being aware of Kevin's interest in computers managed to set up another work experience where he was to input data into a computer in the back of a computer store.

Initially, the work experience started off quite well. The owner was indicating that he was doing a reasonable job. As time passed we began receiving reports of his making a number of errors, and if this wasn't bad enough; having been told that he was not supposed to have anything to do with
customers, upon occasion he was coming into the front of the store and interjecting comments about computers into conversations between the salesman and the customers. Needless to say, this was the end of the work experience.

Once again Kevin returned to the program. I wondered what was going wrong? I decided to look at his behavior. What was it saying about him? What things did he resist doing, even though I knew he could do them well? What things was he choosing to do on his own? He didn't like kitchen jobs as he often ignored an instruction or attempted to give the job to someone else. He enjoyed doing concession where he sold a number of items and took cash. He was choosing to seek out people when trying to get involved in the sales of the computers. Would he make a good waiter?

Giving him this new job, we stood back and watched to see what would happen. What we saw was self-directed behavior and quite appropriate social interaction with customers. I saw a good waiter, one I could rely on and not watch like a hawk.

Time for another work experience, as a waiter. When the work experience was complete Kevin was hired for six months with a subsidy. When the six months was over, he was kept on for another six months without a subsidy before he was laid off.
Approximately a year later we asked him to come and help us out, as some of our students were ill. He hadn't done any serving for almost a year. Although he forgot a few things, he fit back in almost as if he had never left. He was self-directed, asked questions to access the information he needed to know, and was socially appropriate with customers.

In Samantha's second year in the program the chaos around personal difficulties that we had experienced with her in her first year resumed. When we put her out on a work experience, we received the report that she was sometimes not showing up, and at other times had called in sick, none of which she was keeping us informed of. When we talked to her about it, she told us that she couldn't work with the cook at the hotel because this woman, being the mother of an old boyfriend, did not like her.

Once again, I turned my attention towards behavior. What was this behavior achieving? It was monopolizing and holding enormous amounts of teacher time as well as drawing concern from the rest of the students. For what purpose? I couldn't figure it out.

In about April, the frustration of dealing with Samantha's up and downs had brought me to the realization that whatever was happening for her, it was not something I
could help her with in this program. I accepted that she would not be employable until she could change this behavior, and that she likely needed professional help to accomplish this.

As I began to compile some notes in preparation for a meeting with Samantha's guardians, I began to notice that since the beginning of the year, what had been taking place was a repeat performance of many of the same or suspiciously similar stories and situations from the previous year. They even seemed to be occurring at the same time of the year and in the same order. After conferencing with Samantha and her guardians, she withdrew from the program to seek professional help, with the understanding that she could return to complete at a later date.

For me, what stood out so vividly from this experience, was the repetition of the behavior; there was a pattern to it!

Who's Teaching Who?

In the summer of 1992 I was asked to teach a one week assertiveness course for Job Re-entry students during which a class session on family values proved memorable.

Beginning as usual, I asked students to identify three values from a list of twelve; values that had been the most
important in their family as they were growing up. Their choices coming from the following:

1. discipline  
2. acceptance  
3. propriety  
4. responsibility  
5. economic security  
6. education  
7. unity  
8. respect for each other  
9. loyalty  
10. humor  
11. togetherness  
12. spiritual involvement

Once identified, what I usually instructed students to do was to keep their choices to themselves. The purpose of the exercise was to raise their own awareness. However, this time for some unknown reason, I decided to ask students to share the three values they had chosen, whereupon I would put a tick on a chart I had made on the board. Almost all of them chose the same or similar values.

Discipline

Propriety (manners)

Respect For Each Other

Spiritual Involvement

At the end of the day this information was still on the board. Looking at it a second time, what I suddenly
recognized left me stunned. Something so obvious, I missed it the first time.

In combination the values that had been identified, held an expectation of being subservient. Coming from these beliefs one would most assuredly learn to rely on the acceptance and direction of others more powerful than oneself.

In the fall of that year I repeated this exercise with the Food Service students to find similar results. Many of them had chosen the same values with discipline and respect for others being the top two. What struck me was that having discussed what these words actually meant to my students, respect was not for others but rather for the person who was doing the disciplining.

With both of these groups what was actually the most surprising, was what they did not choose:

Education
Responsibility
Acceptance

These were the values that the students, when asked to think about it, were able to identify as being important in the Food Service Program. I verbalized my thoughts about how
difficult it must be to adjust to a program that is so different from what they are used to.

For me this experience offered some insight into why it had been so difficult to motivate my students to think and act for themselves. They really had no understanding of what it meant or felt like to do this.

Ira Shor (1987) in Critical Teaching and Everyday Life presents a similar viewpoint.

The self-discipline and mutual dialogue of a liberatory classroom will be as threatening as they are empowering to students who have been conditioned to await orders. While nominally only a skills-training curriculum, vocationalism thus creates a whole authority-dependent personality. It is a social-psychology for a dominated character. (p.51)

This quote also raises something that I had a growing awareness of, the difference between a "training" program and educating students for independent thought and action.

Feeling that many of the things I had chosen to do worked well for these students and wondering whether they would also prove productive in another setting, in my fourth year I added another part-time program to my work load.
A new venture for the college and again a partnership, this program was to be in conjunction with the psychiatric unit of the local hospital. Students were ex-patients who had been diagnosed and treated for either schizophrenia or bi-polar illnesses. The successful re-integration of these students into the community was the intended outcome of this program.

With an occupational therapist as my co-instructor we began with a tour of existing programs in the Vancouver area. Upon our return we assessed and selected eight students, who not intentionally were all women. Deciding on the name of Social Learning the program began in mid September. Sessions were held three times a week for two hours each, with Sarah, the occupational therapist focusing on teaching the content we had decided upon, while I pursued what was becoming increasingly of interest to me, communication and behavior. As with the Food Service Program I incorporated this into the regular workings of the class identifying things as they occurred which seemed out of place to me. These would then be talked about and examined along with any content we might be studying.

Being the instructor on two programs allowed for some integration of these students. There were several occasions during the year when Simon taught something about cooking, we held joint functions, or some of the Social Learning
students would volunteer to help with a banquet in the Seniors' Centre. Food Service and Social Learning students became quite comfortable with one another.

Early in the year I became aware of another pattern with several of the Food Service students. Their behavior would change quite markedly from the beginning of the week to the end of the week, or from the beginning of a semester to the end of a semester. Students would move from being very dependent for assistance, to being quite independent, and then back to being dependent again. What were the differences between being at school and where they went when they weren't in school?

What was becoming evident to me as each week, month, and year went by, was that I was spending increasingly more of my time focusing on observable behavior and asking myself questions that I could not answer. The answers to my questions would have to come from my students. I felt that somewhere inside of them were the answers, answers that were unique to each of them because of who they were and their experiences in life.

It was from the Social Learning group that a student surfaced from a very indecisive start eventually had quite an impact on me. During her assessment she made no eye
contact, spoke in a very quiet voice, and with each task presented was unable to make any firm decisions, always fearing that another one would be better. She continually changed her mind rendering herself helpless, making no decision at all.

When she began in the program she was living in a boarding home which she had resided in for approximately three years. Within three months, Crystal began changing. Moving to her own apartment and not wanting to be on welfare, she found part-time work which earned her just enough money to live on. She constantly amazed me as to just how little she could get by on, yet still maintaining an air of style and dignity. In the confines of our classroom she was often witty, creative, enthusiastic.

During the year there were several occasions when she fell into despair writing lengthy letters detailing her anguish. Her use of language was like nothing I had ever encountered before with many of her words being unfamiliar to me. She was writing to say that she could not stay in the program because she saw herself as somehow being defective and could never be like other people. As there was something about her that intrigued me, my response to her writing was to seek her out. We would have conversations about what she was experiencing, after which she would agree to carry on.
I recall one day when she was particularly distraught. She wouldn't make eye contact and was hunched over crying and turned away from me. As we talked she began to change. Within fifteen to twenty minutes she was sitting facing me, making eye contact and carrying on an intelligent conversation.

A question to myself at this point was how could someone who has a mental illness change from being so distraught and helpless, to witty and capable in such a short space of time? Having once worked in an institution for the mentally ill where medication, shock therapy and psychotherapy over lengthy periods of time hadn't produced such dramatic changes in behavior, what I had experienced with Crystal just didn't fit.

Another rather interesting discovery arising out of work with this group, was what appeared to be an inability to be specific about a problem. Descriptions offered by students were often very general and lacking in detail. For example, if something was described as bad, what specifically made it bad could not be identified without considerable prompting from instructors.
Thinking about the effect this would have on an individual, a lack of specificity would make it impossible to identify a problem. If you can't identify it, then you can't develop a plan of action to change it. You would be helpless, needing to rely on others to take care of you.

I was also aware of behavioral changes as we progressed through the year. The most obvious set backs and returns to higher levels of function occurring around holidays such as Christmas, or the anniversary dates of significant life events. I found myself wondering whether these might also be part of a pattern.

Something that was common with all of my students since beginning work at the college which also held true for this group, was their resistance to sessions on communication skills. With Food Service and Social Learning, when I initially tried to hold classes entitled Communication Skills I was unable to proceed because of erratic attendance. As non-attendance in the job re-entry group had a monetary consequence, their resistance played out in a slightly different fashion. Here, there were several students who continually went in and out of the classroom door during lessons. At the end of the week my classroom door needed repair, as it was no longer working properly.
An unspoken requirement of Communication Skills is that one needs to look at oneself, which as behavior would indicate is a very uncomfortable thing to do in a formal classroom situation. I was able to get around this with the Food Service students by first building a personal link with each of them. Once this link was established I could then identify and use real experiences in the restaurant as examples. Eventually, they were comfortable enough with what I was doing that I could formally take it back into a classroom setting.

The Social Learning group resisted any efforts to do communication skills until almost three months into the year. By then a relationship of trust had been established. The job re-entry group had been difficult and at times rather volatile to work with, but by weeks end they were quite positive about the experiences we had shared, more trustful of me, and more positive about themselves.

Of the eight women who participated in the Social Learning Program, five made quite dramatic progress during that year and to my knowledge are still doing well. As for Crystal by year end she was working two jobs, had attended a night school class and was elected by her peers to be their representative on the Social Learning Advisory Committee.
Further Reflections

Four years had passed during which time I had witnessed so many unusual events. Events that had changed much of my original thinking and approach to persons with disabilities. I had fallen into a pattern of observing, reflecting and acting, constantly moving from one experience to another as they might catch my interest or arouse my suspicions. This pattern I later discovered could formally be identified as action research. McCutcheon and Jung (1990) in their paper titled "Alternative Perspectives on Action Research" offer this description, "While perspectives and methodologies vary, by 'action research' here we mean inquiry teachers undertake to understand and improve their own practice" (p. 144).

Capitalizing on what I had learned from my observations, reflections and actions, I had stopped planning but rather preferred to draw on and expand upon things as they unfolded before me. Classroom sessions often started from a question or a situation with respect to something that had occurred during the day.

I felt I was learning as much as I was teaching. I discovered that if I allowed students to draw on each other
to find the answers to a problem, that they very often came up with what I would have taught them and almost always a few things I would not. Classroom sessions became alive and rich with possibilities.

Along with my enthusiasm for what was occurring in my programs was a growing discomfort about pursuing activities which did not fit my understanding of how and what I should be teaching to my students. Vocational Training was taking place, but it was by no means my primary focus. My role was no longer that of an instructor as I understood it to be, but rather more heavily leaning towards counseling. But even counselor did not really fit what I was doing. I was somewhere in between.


The teacher accepts a variety of roles, at oscillating distances from the action. The teacher is the person whose intellectual skills make her or him responsible for provoking conceptual literacy in the critical study of a subject area. However, as the process takes, the teacher is not always the leading factor in class. After catalyzing discussion, at moments of the greatest
success, the teacher experiences a dissolution, blending into the group deliberation. At moments of partial or full breakdown, the teacher experiences her or his role reconstituted, separated out for the restoration of the process. (p.101)

This description offers a more accurate picture of how I was choosing to be with my students. I began to see myself as constantly changing roles according to what I perceived to be needed at a particular point in time. My intention always being to maintain a collaborative learning environment for my students.

I had a need to document what was actually happening so that others might also benefit from this process. I felt that I had discovered so many useful things but I also had the sense that it was only the tip of something very complicated and by no means clear to me. Much of what I chose to do in a given situation seemed intuitive, I had no explanation for why I chose to do what I did, I only knew deep down inside that it was what needed to happen.

The latter seems to imply the existence and use of tacit knowledge. Altrichter et al (1993) offers this description, "'tacit knowledge' which is the result of our experience but, normally, not directly and consciously at our disposal"(p.25).
Seeking to understand why I did what I did, when the opportunity to begin a Masters Program arose in 1993 I made it my goal to seek clarification of what I had been experiencing over the past four years. I wanted to be able to write about it and share it with others.

From course work completed in the summer of 1993, aspects of theory drawn from Family Therapy seemed to fit for much of the behavior I had been watching, with descriptions of recursive patterns of behavior, family structure, boundaries, parental and sibling subsystems. I was excited as it offered some clarity to the things I had been witnessing with students over the past few years, a framework from which I could posit numerous possibilities. I came away with the feeling that I had somehow created a pseudo-family for my students to dwell in. It also gave me some other things to consider. What rules, structure, boundaries, roles, and reciprocity in behavior were occurring in my classroom, in the kitchen, and in the restaurant?
CHAPTER FOUR
MORE THEMES

Relationships and Roles

When the Food Service Program began again in September, 1993 my attention was on the interactive behavior occurring between those involved in the program; students with each other, students with instructors, students with volunteers, students with practicum students, and students with customers. What I began to notice were subtle to dramatic changes in student behavior and productivity depending on who they worked with. There seemed to be a point, where if students were helped too much, what actually occurred was that they ceased much of their independent behavior, reverting back into seeking support and guidance.

My need to understand, motivated me to ask questions of my students as to what their behavior was saying about them? What did it mean? Where had it come from? What purpose was it serving for them?

When observing something different from what seemed their normal behavior, I would describe it to them and then ask them to write in their journal about their awareness of what was different or happening for them at that time. My students responded to my observations and questions. What
followed, through journal writing and one to one interviews was the identification of themes and similar experiences they had had in the past. Then together we sought understanding and meanings as to why they did what they did, felt as they did, and whether they really wanted to stay as they were, or make a commitment to change things for themselves.

As students shared their stories, what surfaced was the repetition of behavior patterns, repetition of themes, repetition of similar relationships, with the beginnings almost always going back into their childhood, their families of origin.

Watching interactions in the program and also in other aspects of my life, I often had the feeling that what I was seeing was to some degree a re-creation of the environment one came from. As I watched, over a period of time I would build a picture from the bits and pieces of conflictive interactions I witnessed. The result being that my best guesses about what might be happening for students proved to be gaining in accuracy. Reasonable explanations for their present behavior could often be uncovered by gaining an awareness of past experiences.

In short, intervening at some time between the first and second scene, the child comes to know, or be able to understand, the meaning of the first scene. The memory of this scene has been repressed or removed from consciousness. When the second scene occurs, and recalls the first, the child reacts retrospectively to the latter's meaning. (p.53)

This process allowed me to see my students from another perspective. A perspective which was coming from a deepened understanding and ability to empathize with who they were.

Interpersonal relationships and an inability to act effectively in them, were very often holding my students back. A large part of this seemed to be learned behavior which they unconsciously repeated time and again. I began to look at all behavior as serving some purpose and that it existed for a reason. If students could understand where the behavior came from, could see that it was no longer useful to them, it might be possible for them to make a conscious effort to change it.
Early in the year, Crystal (from the Social Learning class) being somewhat interested in becoming a student in the Food Service Program, came for an assessment. She did quite well, but to be full-time presented some difficulties because she was still maintaining some part-time work. I also had concerns that the commitment of thirty hours of class time per week was a rather large jump from the six hours she was used to. After some discussions, a schedule that would accommodate her was agreed upon.

Because she had difficulty being around too many people, Crystal began working in the kitchen doing dish washing and food preparation. In addition I sought to give her extra challenges hoping to draw out a creative side she had shown during the Social Learning class in the previous year.

I recall her arrival in class one day with some mini bagels she had baked that morning which were excellent! Later that year she contributed the most beautiful cookies, all quite different. She had decorated them using white icing, red candy and black licorice pulled into fine strands. With these items she had created umbrellas, faces and several other unique designs. They were so impressive it was a shame to eat them.

It was becoming increasingly disturbing to me just how many of these students were unaware of their strengths while
often holding their disability out front, like a banner. They seemed to use their disabilities too often as a reason not to try, or as a reason for lack of success in the past. They lived out the label that someone else had attached to them -- someone who saw their weaknesses not their strengths.

I could see much strength and creativity in Crystal and it became important to me, to help her see and recognize it too. I became convinced that a stronger more independent side existed in all of my students which with renewed vigor on my part, I intended to find.

Holding strongly to these beliefs, when Joe arrived one day in November for a visit and to have lunch, I began to wonder about what more we could have taught him if he were in the program now. When he had completed Level One two years ago, I had the opinion that further progress was unlikely, and had encouraged him to seek employment. Last year he had returned and Simon hired him as a part-time dishwasher for a few months when we were extremely busy.

I started to recall in my mind the things Joe had been particularly good at. He had an incredible memory. If he met you once he remembered your name and if you told him your birth date he remembered that too. His basic
mathematics and spelling were better than most of the other students, and although he took a little longer to learn something, once he got it he didn't forget. He liked people, although his conversation was often awkward. He also kept coming back regularly to visit the program. Should we take him back into the program and train him as a waiter?

Discussing this thought with Simon, we decided to ask Joe if coming back into the program as a student was something he would like to do? The answer was yes.

It was now my suspicion that Joe had a learned set of behaviors that made those around him believe he was incapable of thinking or initiating much on his own. It had always been mine and everyone else's pattern to give up after one or two attempts at getting an intelligent answer from him. I, therefore, increased my attempts to four and five tries at rewording and redescribing. As I persisted I made it known to him that I believed he knew the answers. My questions were about things related to his new job as a waiter, what he saw customers doing, and then based on this information what he thought he should do next. My perseverance paid off. He began to answer my questions. He began to dress-up in his best clothes to be at work. One day he was so aware of what was happening in the dining
room, he covered for the other waiters, picking up on things they had missed.

These changes in Joe's behavior were happening very quickly compared to the last time he had been in the program. But his ability to function at this level was not yet consistent. Even so, if he wasn't able to think for himself, how could he do it at all?

Joe progressed steadily until about March, when his attentions began to turn to other issues, girls and moving out on his own. As these issues became more of a priority, they seemed to consume him which in turn affected his work. He began doing very inappropriate things in the dining room to which Simon would react with disapproval and send him to the classroom, a pattern which began occurring on a fairly regular basis. For me these conflicts with Simon were more reflective of a father and son, than an instructor and student. Joe was acting in similar ways to that of a rebellious teenager. However, this acting out behavior was something we could not effectively deal with in so public a program. Joe needed help with his issues more than vocational training, but unfortunately it wasn't something we could assist him with. It became quite a struggle for him and for Simon to last the two months till year end.
In the fall of 1993 course work provided my first introduction to curriculum writings, to which as is usual for me, I found myself drawn to those which either validated my thoughts and methodology or those from which bits and pieces made sense or fit with my perception of things.

A theory which seemed to hold some validity based on my experiences was that of social reproduction. It would seem that when we as teachers make choices and set goals for our students because of what the powers that be recommend, or based on past performance and labels, we limit their growth. We only get what we are "training" for, based on these parameters and our own assumptions.

A research example from Anyon in Pinar (1988) concurs with this notion, "A study of special education classes in several urban school systems found that fewer than 10% of all students assigned to special education classes ever returned to the regular program"(p.181).

If I had continued to use an instrumental approach, I would have assured the continuation of my students as Adult Special Education, incapable of thinking or acting for themselves. But I stopped making assumptions, I stopped directing and controlling them and have since witnessed dramatic changes in their behavior, to that of being much more self-directed. This seems to have influenced their
ability to function in all situations, be it vocational, academic, or social.

The following quote from Noddings and Shore (1984) *Awakening the Inner Eye* is descriptive of my perspective at this time:

The quest for understanding establishes a direction in the intuitive mode but this direction is at once both sure-and-clear and continually open to change. We know where we are headed but must constantly tack to stay on a course we cannot chart before hand. (p.81)

The program had become student driven, which for me meant moving with my students, rather than having them follow my lead. I no longer taught using lesson plans, or task analysis. I presented students with questions and problems, and together we sought answers and solutions. This process was reflective and cyclical. Students were engaged in self and group evaluation. I challenged them to better understand themselves and why they did what they did, and to change it if it did not work for them.

Working to help Crystal recognize, and then maintain her strengths proved similar to the experiences in Social
learning. She was able to show a little more of her spontaneous and creative self but still had days when she struggled with feelings of being inept and unworthy.

Recognizing her love of reading and her leanings toward written expression as a strength, I suggested that she try keeping a journal in which she could write about the people she was around when she wasn't in school and what kind of reaction she had to each of them. I was hoping to see if specific people might go along with her feelings of disparity. I explained to her my notion that she might possibly be reacting to those around her. Being that her relationship with me was usually quite positive, I wanted her to attempt to identify if there were other people who also did this for her, as well as those who might cause the opposite. If this was in fact the case, and she was in contact with those that drew out these opposite behaviors from her several times over the course of a week, it might explain why she never really felt good about herself for very long. I imagined such an experience being rather like an emotional roller coaster ride. It might also suggest that if she could avoid those who disturbed her, she could maintain a sense of well-being for longer than a day.

She tried this and reported that she did in fact become aware of how certain people influenced her. She had found that very intellectual people made her feel quite inferior
and stupid and that over-protective, over-helping people made her feel helpless and incapable. She also indicated that there were a number of these people in her life.

I left her to work with this new understanding and hopefully find some stability for herself. As time passed she seemed to be getting stronger and more able to maintain a level plane of emotionality.

It was about this time that I really began to question whether the diagnosis she had been labeled with, schizophrenia, was in her case really an illness at all. I recall an experience while working at Riverview Hospital of several conversations with a patient who to me seemed very clear on what was happening around him. Interestingly enough, he became confused and not able to carry on a conversation when a doctor, nurse, or therapist came near. At the time I thought maybe he was just acting the part for their benefit. Now I wonder if there was something about interacting with these people that influenced this change in his behavior. Was he even aware this was happening?

In the second semester Crystal was ready for a work experience at a local store. After having done quite well at general cleaning and restocking of shelves she was hired as a part-time employee. Over the next year, she went on to
attain her driver's license, take a Spanish course, and spoke of wanting to save money so that she might go to Europe and work as a nanny.

In mid March Simon made a comment about wishing he had a giant picture of me he could put up in the Seniors' Centre because he felt that students worked more productively when I was there than when I wasn't. Having started on my Master's Program, at the beginning of this year I had made a choice to work only with the Food Service Program. But at this particular point in time, I had agreed to do five weeks of relief work in the Social Learning Program as one of the Instructors was on maternity leave. This made the times that I was away from the Centre more predictable, which had also been the case in the previous year. It had been my pattern before Social Learning and during this year up until now, to vary my hours as student and business needs warranted. What Simon was indicating was an awareness on his part of changes in student performance which he linked to my presence in and absence from the program.

Wanting to investigate this further I discussed with Simon the possibility of a temporary change, my proposal being that I come in earlier each morning to supervise kitchen activities, instead of him. Agreeing on this course
of action, I then informed students that for the next while Simon and I were going to change jobs. Beginning the next morning, I would be with them in the kitchen and Simon would be working on something else away from the Centre.

Having to work within the limits of my part-time hours I arrived at work thirty minutes after the regular start time for the program. To both mine and Simon's amazement students were operating at very high levels of independent work having already completed almost half of the mornings work routine. It seemed from this result that even the expectation of my being in the program area might somehow influence student behavior.

Another question which occurs to me now is whether Simon's behavior had somehow been different because of his awareness that I was coming in to replace him. Did Simon do anything in the time before I arrived which was different than he usually did?

Deciding to take a closer look at how we might differ in our teaching methods, I sought Simon's cooperation to make and analyze some video tapes of one to one teaching situations with three different students at the expeditor station. The expeditor station is the front counter of the kitchen where there is an open window into the restaurant.
The counter is set up with warmers on either side and is equipped with side plates, bowls, garnishes, buns, large plates and appropriate utensils such as ladles, slotted spoons, and scoops. Immediately behind is a work island and directly behind that is the stove and grill. On the left side of the kitchen for the full length of the wall is the dish washing run while the right side of the kitchen is counter space, a refrigerator and Simon's office.

During lunch service, three to four students plus one instructor are in the kitchen, with students performing one of the following jobs; expediter, grill cook, salad chef, or dishwasher. The instructor taking a facilitator role focuses on getting students to work cooperatively and efficiently to fill the food orders coming in from the restaurant, assisting only when necessary.

It is at the expediter station that student servers make contact with the kitchen putting orders in, or picking up food at the window. It is the expediter's job to control the traffic flow of orders in and out of the kitchen. When an order is received at the window the bill is checked for clarity and a carbon copy of the order is passed to the cook. The expediter is responsible to plate up the special, add garnishes, bowl soup, quality check orders, and make sure that orders go out within a reasonable time. When
there are several different orders from one table, the goal is to send them all out together if possible.

In the front of the restaurant there are usually three to five students who work with Jean and the other instructor. There are usually twenty to forty customers, many of whom arrive within fifteen to twenty minutes of each other. The lunch service often takes on the tone and tempo of a McDonald's rush.

Setting up the video camera in Simon's office located just off the kitchen, I proceeded over several days to capture myself and Simon working with the same three students for ten minutes each. The students chosen for the sequences all functioned at different levels. I chose them in order to get a more accurate picture with respect to the differences that existed in the functional levels of students in the program.

Next began the rather tedious work of analysis. I enlisted Jean's help with the making of transcriptions of what had been said along with brief notations as to behavior, I then proceeded to the problem of wondering what I was going to look at.

Reading through the transcriptions several times, it occurred to me that I might start by categorizing the verbalizations into the following: open ended questions
(how, when, what), identifying good work, identifying poor work, accepting student ideas, direct instruction, suggestions, clarifying and other. Once categorized I then went back and identified the frequency of use during each ten minute segment. (See Table 1)

Borrowing some constructs from family therapy, I then went on to look at stance, congruence and incongruence, and relationship style. Family therapy infers that relationships influence one another, and that there are reciprocal and reoccurring patterns of interactions. Having the experience of identifying some of these patterns from a video tape in a class the previous summer, I wanted to see if similar things might be occurring here.

With respect to the type and frequency of the verbalizations, what I discovered was that I used considerably more verbalizations than Simon did, with both of us using more open ended questions than any of the other identified categories. Also in common was that the amount of verbalizations decreased as the student level of function increased. I asked open ended questions, clarified, or accepted student ideas most frequently, while Simon used open ended questions and direct instruction. With each student we adjusted our verbalizations so that although there were similarities, there were no consistent patterns.
Table 1

Instructor Verbalizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructor A</th>
<th>Instructor B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>open ended questions</td>
<td>frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accepts ideas</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clarify</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct instruction</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good work</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suggests</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open ended questions</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clarify</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good work</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accepts ideas</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>suggests</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>direct instruction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor work</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open ended questions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accepts ideas</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good work</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suggests</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>direct instruction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor work</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Examples of Verbalizations
- open ended questions - What do you need to do next? (how, when)
- accepting ideas - yes, okay.
- clarifying - You put extra green onions on it?
- direct instruction - Put it inside the carrot like this.
- poor work - Why are you putting ugly parsley on?
- good work - He is on a roll! He is thinking!
- other - I'm not feeling well. (off topic/task)
The most distinct difference was with the identification of poor work, Simon making thirteen verbalizations to my two, with nine of these being in relation to the lowest functioning student.

Verbalizations amongst Simon and the students were predominantly instructor to one student at a time, with little communication between the students themselves. When reviewing myself on this aspect, I seemed to play more of an equal part in what was occurring, with communication happening between students as well as with me.

I wondered about the fact that I didn't have the expertise to rescue my students if things began to go wrong. In fact, most of them were more knowledgeable about their kitchen tasks than I was. I needed them to pull their weight as much as they needed me to pull mine. Whereas with Simon, he was seen as the expert who could help/rescue if he felt pressured to do so.

Stemming from my fascination with behavior I decided to look at stance. Becvar and Becvar (1988) in Family Therapy a Systemic Integration describe Virginia Satir's five types:

Thus the placator looks as well as speaks in the role of the passive, weak, self-effacing individual who always
agrees with others. By contrast, the blamer usually disagrees no matter what, always finds fault with others, and is the picture of the self-righteous finger-pointer. The super-reasonable individual assumes computerlike rigid posture devoid of feelings but is extremely logical and intellectual, at least in appearance. The irrelevant individual is characterized by unrelated and distracting behaviors and seems to consider neither self nor others in the process of communicating. Finally, the congruent individual sends level messages in which words and feelings match, and neither the self, the other, nor the context is denied. (p.204-205)

Although I based my analysis on the above I wish to make it known that for me, all of these labels and descriptions, except for congruent, seem somewhat extreme and offer no variations within each of the stances.

After reviewing the videos I categorized myself as predominantly congruent seeing most of my behavior as being consistent with being available to assist, but only when needed. Throughout the video segments I have my hands in my pockets or behind my back, I walk over and look at things
being done and then step back again. I smile, give eye contact, make gestures, point and nod.

Simon appeared to demonstrate two stances, with the most predominant one being congruent with mannerisms of pointing, gesturing, standing and watching. His posture was relaxed and he would often raise his eyebrows when asking questions. He appeared to be available to assist, but only when needed.

In contrast his other stance is what I would classify as a very low key version of Satir's blamer, which I prefer to rename the Head Chef. This stance consisted of picking up and showing, throwing things out in the garbage, touching and re-arranging containers, demonstrating what should be done, tasting food, and adjusting food on the plates. There was a pattern of moving about the kitchen sampling and scrutinizing, trying to identify any problems before food would leave the kitchen.

Congruence and incongruence is in reference to communication which is seen as being on two levels, digital (or verbal) and process (or non-verbal). If the two phases are matching then the communication is congruent, and if the body language does not match the verbal then an incongruence is identified. To determine this aspect I compared stance and verbalizations.
Here I saw myself as most often being congruent. An example being:

"What could you be doing besides having this big conversation which is not relevant to food?" (standing with hands in pockets)

The statement is encouraging students to think and act for themselves and the behavior is also indicating by the hands in the pockets that I am not going to give them any clues.

With Simon there seemed to be shifts between congruent and incongruent. Congruence is exemplified by the following:

Simon: What do you think about parsley? (Moves in closer to Joe)

Joe: About parsley?

Simon: What is so difficult for you today with this parsley? (gestures)

Joe: Parsley's are hard to check to see if they are good or ugly.


Both the words and the behavior reflect Simon's desire to understand.

An incongruence is reflected by the following:

Simon: Did the toasted tuna go?

Jane: Yes it did. (begins to say something else)
Simon: Did the toasted tuna go? Answer, yes. End of story. (cut off what student was saying, tone of voice sharp, and moved away when finished)

The statements are clarifying, whereas the behavior reflects annoyance and a desire to break off the conversation.

The final aspect I looked at in the videos was the relationship style that was occurring between instructor and student in terms of three kinds; complimentary which refers to opposite kinds of behavior such as passive and aggressive, symmetrical which is when similar kinds of behavior are occurring, and parallel which is having role flexibility, when both complimentary and symmetrical occur interchangeably.

Here I seemed to move between parallel and symmetrical with parallel being dominant in two of the three videos. An example being:

Linda: What did the board say?

Jane: The board said beef dip with potato salad this morning.

Linda: It said that this morning?

Jane: Yes it did.

Linda: I wasn't here. All I have seen is beef dip. This begins with the instructor in the more powerful position while questioning where the potato salad fit into
the menu. The exchange ends as the student moves to the more powerful position when the instructor accepts her answer.

I demonstrate a symmetrical relationship when I move in to work along with or beside a student and use statements like:

What do we do with this order?
We need an order of toast.
The we statements and the behavior indicate a sense of sameness and equality.

Simon appears to shift between complimentary and symmetrical, with complimentary being dominant. The example previously identified as being incongruent, with Jane and the toasted tuna is reflective of this complimentary relationship with Simon maintaining the more powerful position of the two.

The following is an example of a symmetrical relationship:

Simon: Holy Moly! Is that ever ugly. What did you do, put it in a 500 degree oven? (Using napkin to pick up plate)

Dave: Yea, something like that. (Smiling)
Simon: You're bad! You're bad! (teasing, smiling)

Dave: I did not mean to. (Smiling)

Simon: It is okay, I will run with the plate. Ah!
Ah! Ah! (running and holding plate up high)

Here when making fun and joking with Dave, Simon is equal.

Having completed the analysis of the videos, there appeared to have been subtle, yet apparently significant differences in teaching style, as well as some distinct linkages or patterns between the constructs of verbalization, stance, congruence/incongruence, and relationship style.

Simon's congruent stance coincides with open ended questions, accepting student ideas, clarifying, suggesting, and a relationship style that although predominantly complimentary is reserved in demeanor.

There are shifts from the above mentioned complimentary relationship into a symmetrical one when he jokes around with the students.

His Head Chef stance coincides with identifying poor work, giving direct instructions, some incongruent communication and a complimentary relationship style which is somewhat stronger in demeanor than with his congruent stance.
Looking at myself, my congruent stance coincides with open ended questions, clarifying, accepting student ideas, acknowledging good work, and a relationship style that is usually parallel (student and instructor changing roles). The student maintains a complimentary relationship being in the more powerful position when working independently. As students need assistance I will then move into this position just long enough for them to once again take charge of their work. A shift into a symmetrical relationship occurs when I mimic or work beside a student, occurring when a parallel relationship cannot be established.

An increase in the functional level of our students would seem to coincide with the instructor being congruent (in stance and verbal communication), to as much as possible keep the relationship parallel (student and instructor changing roles), and to predominantly ask open ended questions, clarify, accept student ideas and acknowledge good work.

What appeared to decrease level of function was a Head Chef stance, incongruent communication, a complimentary relationship where students are in a powerless position, identification of poor work and direct instruction.

This investigation raised several questions for me.
Could the way that we as instructors teach and relate to our students have as much or even more relevance to student achievement than I.Q.?

Are teachers and students influencing one another in maintaining the status quo?

Are we as stuck in our roles as our students appear to be in theirs?

For me Simon's role of Head Chef is representative of the realities of the work place and many classrooms which are presently instructor/supervisor driven. This is a role that students need to learn to recognize and how it affects them and their ability to function, as it will surely be encountered outside of the program. Without an understanding of why, they will inevitably go out to work or move into another social environment where they may find themselves having trouble and not know how to change this for themselves.

Investigating the differences between the relationships that Simon and I create with students allowed me to recognize these subtle shifts in behavior. Behavior that seemed to be drawing students in to play the counterpart of
a role that the more powerful person in the relationship was presently dictating. Or, was quite the opposite true, that the helpless, under functioning behavior of our students is actually calling us in to play their counterpart. Either way, it would seem that these roles aren't permanently fixed and that my counselor/facilitator role and Simon's congruent and joking roles present opportunities for the growth of our students. An opportunity to experience a different more productive role than the one they have so consistently played. But without an understanding of these roles and how they influence student behavior, their all too familiar role of being helpless will continually be replayed.

After gaining this awareness, I decided to investigate whether students had any conscious recognition of our body language. To do this I made up a sheet of statements describing instructor behavior as transcribed from the videos. I then asked all of the students to indicate in a space next to each statement from their recollection, which instructor was being described. The students proved to be fairly aware, but surprisingly, it was Joe who was the most accurate at identifying our mannerisms. Joe who several years before repeatedly asked questions about where to put things away in the kitchen, who more often than not appeared to function at a low level, but who had also shown
us he possessed the ability to be someone very different. This was another one of those times.

Wondering whether changing the way Simon taught students might get different results, I suggested that he lead a classroom session but not in his usual way. Instead of standing at the board, leading the discussion and making notes I wanted him to sit with the students. Then with a student assigned as a recorder, his role would be to ask open ended questions, try to get everyone participating, clarify when needed, and accept anything reasonable that students might offer to the discussion.

When the students first entered the classroom they had strange looks on their faces, recognizing something unusual was going on. As they took their seats, Simon requested a volunteer to record notes on the flip chart, which after some hesitation, Dave consented to do. Dave was the most likely candidate. Always very personable and demonstrating excellent potential to be both a cook and a server, he also appeared to be seen by most of the students as the leader of the class.

What proceeded to take place in that classroom session as I watched from the back of the room was very interesting. Eventually all of the students began to talk freely. The
recorder appeared confident, even though spelling had never been demonstrated as one of Dave's strengths. The information that was covered was complete and well done. The students enjoyed it. Simon indicated that it had been difficult to maintain that way of working with students but recognized the positive outcomes.

After several days of using this format the students began one session on their own. They picked a recorder and carried on from where they had left off.

Simon and I began to jest about how our students seemed not to need us anymore. I recognized something I have since referred to, as non-teaching-teaching.

Becvar and Becvar (1988) state, "The process of differentiation starts as a personal, individual process and progresses into the transformation of relationships in the entire family system" (p. 144). In the beginning stages, I was alone with my intuitive process. As time went on, I began to include first Simon, then Jean, and more and more of the other individuals connected with the program. Systems theory implies that if you change one part of the system, it effects change in the rest of the system. The Food Service Program seemed to be a living example of this process. Over a four year time frame everyone in the program had changed in some way, instructors, students, and
our volunteer. We were learning and growing together as people.

My thoughts at this point questioned the significance of the fact that neither myself nor my now co-instructor Simon had any expertise in each other's field, nor a lot of teaching experience when we started. Had this encouraged a recognizing and building on each other's strengths? In addition, we had gained a volunteer who offered many insightful contributions and who had been with us for several years, a very unusual situation at the college level. What was the significance of these relationships? And what of our students, some who had continued to participate actively in all that was asked of them for up to three years.

Noddings (1992) in the introduction to her book, The Challenge to Care in Schools writes:

Pretend that we have a large heterogeneous family to raise and educate. Our children have different ethnic heritages, widely different intellectual capacities, different physical strengths and different interests. We want to respect their legitimate differences. At the same time, we think there are some things that they all should learn and some things they should be exposed to so
that they can make well-informed choices. How should we educate them? (p.xiii)

Reflecting on the experiences of the previous years, it seemed that we had stumbled onto some answers to this question. It was my belief at this point, that we could not make assumptions about the learning capacities of our students; that the primary focus needed to be on the hidden curriculum, with the knowledge based curriculum being the vehicle of the learning process.

For me, the hidden curriculum is the human, personal and relational aspects that occur daily in classrooms to which little or no attention is paid. We should be attempting to create a healthy environment for our students to dwell in where all experiences can be used as learning experiences; a place where students can reconstruct and give new meaning to their world. This is part of a process that systems theory might call differentiation. I see it as the gaining of independence and free choice.

**Shifting Roles and Hierarchical Structures**

During the first few months of our sixth year I focused quite heavily on journal writing with two of my students Victoria and Randy. The majority of their time for a week was spent writing, dialoguing with me about what they had written, what I saw in their writing, and then writing some
more. What occurred with both of these students was quite amazing. At the end of that time frame a totally different person emerged, someone who was so different from what they had been that I found myself wondering about the validity of the labels that had been attached to these students. How does someone totally change their functional behavior in one week when they are supposedly handicapped? I don't think they can. The ability to be this other person had to have been there all along. Looking at themselves had somehow brought it out.

Although this potential had been recognized, for Victoria and Randy to maintain their new selves, it was a constant struggle. It seemed that there were always situations when, as with Crystal, other people in their lives influenced their shift back. With some assistance, Victoria was usually able to pull herself back to her more productive self, but her world seemed a very tumultuous and difficult place to maintain her new self for very long. Randy on the other hand returned to his old behaviors showing little sign of his other self.

Unfortunately, as previously uncovered in my coursework with Dr. Ted Aoki, the shifts back were beginning to occur
more often, with other students in the program, and myself, an indicator for me that something was wrong.

As the sixth year progressed, struggles within myself and a growing discomfort of feeling like I was becoming invisible, and had lost my voice were getting stronger. From my perspective, something had definitely changed. I was no longer able to communicate effectively with Simon. He had somehow over the last while become the person others saw as being in charge of the program. Decisions were being made about students that were not being discussed and agreed upon together. My suggestions seemed to be unheard or ignored. I was feeling intensely unhappy, having to watch things happen around me which I viewed as counterproductive, but no longer seeming to have any authority to influence or change them. I felt caught in a place where I felt useless, like a piece of fluff. I had been here before. It had been with different people, it had been a different place and a different time, but the feelings, my reactions and the behaviors of those around me were all too familiar.

The "structure" of the program had changed. Simon was now seen as being in charge and was responding accordingly. I was no longer an equal partner. My first reaction was to fight against what I felt in my heart was going to be the deconstruction of all we had achieved. But this was to no
avail. Somehow things in both Simon's and my own life had reached such stress points that I was replaying some of my old behavior (my learned behavior), that of a mediator, an enabler, someone who carries everyone else's pain.

For several months I had felt myself sinking deeper and deeper as I carried my own frustration and that of the students while I rushed about trying to keep things together. I felt as if I was putting bandages on, when an operation was required.

What was occurring seemed so similar to our first year, the difference being that Simon was now the Instructor and I had become his assistant.

About the end of January, I realized that there was nothing I could do to change things. That they would have to run their course and that maybe, after a while, an opportunity to grow from the experience would present itself. I felt the program had come full circle, and even though things weren't going well at that moment, things could change again when the opportunity presented itself. As I had always said to my students, all experiences are potential learning opportunities and this could be one too. For the final two months of this year I focused on the
interactions, structure and roles of those still participating in the program.

Early in April at the end of the day on a Friday there was a great commotion in the girls washroom. Three of the students called Jean in to see, who in turn called me to view what had been written on the bathroom wall.

I hate Chris and Randy
Thay are fagets
Si nd
A. French
T. Smith
P. Christensen
SA

Jean was shocked at the behavior, saying that we had never had anything like this happen before. The students all wanted to know who did it. Randy said it didn't bother him. He didn't get mad, he got even. I responded by saying how it saddened me that relations between students had reached such a point that someone felt the need to express
themselves in such a fashion. I commented to Jean that given the relationship dynamics of the past months that I was not entirely surprised by this behavior. That the writing was quite literally on the wall.

After coffee break on Monday morning, I suggested that we address the issue of the writing on the bathroom wall which had occurred on the previous Friday. Students were still guessing about who had done it. But from my perspective this aspect was unimportant. What was of importance was an examination of what this occurrence said about our program. I wanted my students to think about the possibility that it may in fact say something about all of us.

Beginning with a question written on the board, "What purpose does graffiti serve?", students identified the kinds of things they associated graffiti with, such as graduation, advertising, and artwork. They then moved on to identify who did graffiti, that others read it, and finally concluded that it was actually a form of communication (a message). I then suggested they try to identify what the writer might have been feeling like. Hurt, angry, frustrated, vengeful were all offered as possibilities. Next was a closer look at the message itself, males vs. females (four girls to two boys). The first statement started with I yet it ended with
a group. What did all of this mean? Was this a clear message? How reflective was this message of what was actually happening in the program right now? How does a message like this make you feel?

My intent was to get students to recognize that this was a very strong communication and that the person who wrote it didn't feel safe enough to share it with anyone in person. That it was a visual display of something drastically wrong with our program; the dividing and siding of the class, females against males, and an inability to communicate effectively between them.

Was this situation productive for anyone?

Was this something that they wished to continue?

My own thoughts questioned whether it was the aftermath or had been influenced by the difficulties being experienced by Simon and myself in our working relationship. Were our difficulties filtering through the whole program?

I wanted students to identify how they could change what was happening in the program, their program. What could they do to help each other feel safe and included? I asked them how they might identify whether or not a problem
existed? What did this make them feel like? If they were feeling bad what might happen to the people around them? What happens to everyone's ability to work?

Simon made the comment that he had seen this happen in the hotel business. Everyone started fighting, and then people quit. Jean did a great role play of lunch conversations, how students postured and some negative things that had been said. By the end of the session the students had identified twelve things that they were going to do to change things. These were posted on the board.

The next day while watching Simon's interactions with Caroline, a student at the end of her first year in the program, I noticed that if he stood up straight and spoke firmly, she had difficulty answering his questions. When he slouched and leaned on the counter, she answered more quickly with her answers being reasonably thoughtful. I continued watching this shifting back and forth for several exchanges and then as I had sensed a shift in Simon after yesterday's session, I identified for him what I had been observing. He began experimenting with this and agreed with my observation.

Simon's behavior seemed to be influencing Caroline's functional level. I wondered about whether she had somehow
learned to associate power and/or intelligence with standing up straight and speaking in a firm voice. Or was the opposite true? Did under-functioning behavior call for a directive overhelping response from others?

From this Simon and I began a long discussion about how our behavior impacts on students. How we as instructors impact on others without recognizing it. The conversation moved to reflect on what had been happening between us over the past year and how things had changed --- not for the positive. The stress levels we had been working under had been influencing the program.

Simon and I were communicating again, agreeing to work together to rebuild what had worked the best for all of us, students, instructors and our volunteer.

The students ran lunch service by themselves that day with no help from Simon or myself. At three o'clock we sat and had coffee, Jean, Simon and myself. Caroline came and sat with us and after her, others gathered. We said goodbye to each other, tired but with smiling faces. We had once again found that sense of wholeness, safety. The structure that worked had returned to the program, a more positive, productive setting, with instructors who are
equal, concerned for students, encouraging of students, having clear boundaries, expectations, and roles.

A couple of days later at coffee time four ex-students dropped by for a visit. It makes me wonder about what they found here when they were in the program, and what draws them back again and again. When I go to visit someone out of choice, it is usually because I know I will be welcome, and I feel close to that person in some way.

Several days later Simon and David, our student viewed as the leader of the class, were in the kitchen with Caroline. Together, pretending not to know how to do anything (i.e., chop up vegetables for a platter, arrange vegetables on the platter, cut cheese slices and meat slices), they asked Caroline numerous questions about what to do and how they should do it. For about a half an hour she maintained a leadership role directing them.

After break time she turned the tables, pulling them back into their leadership roles by returning to a non-thinking rather confused state which she demonstrated by cooking poached eggs for 15 minutes, only doing one task at a time, and not organizing her work.

There were several other occasions when Simon and David replayed this scenario with Caroline, always getting the same results. It would seem that she could function at two
quite distinct levels with one being more familiar and easier to maintain. The knowledge that she actually possessed and could demonstrate if given the opportunity was quite high, appearing to have been there all along.

Near the end of April we held a class session to investigate whether birth order might influence student level of function in the program.

Simon demonstrated how to build a rather complicated paper airplane after which four students were selected to attempt the task. Unbeknown to my students, I purposely selected a first born, a youngest, a middle and an only. As these students worked, four other students were assigned to observe their behavior and record what they saw. After several minutes had passed the activity was stopped and students were asked to share what they had experienced. Recording their observations on the board, what came out of this exercise was that the first born gave instructions and suggestions, quickly assuming the leadership role; the only wanted to do it herself, refusing all help, but remained very intent on completing the task; the youngest worked under the first born's supervision; and the middle sat quietly, watched and smiled. After the latter had been identified I asked if there was anyone else in the program.
that the description of a middle fit. A few moments passed when Simon sounding somewhat shocked said, it's you! I agreed. Much of my behavior did fit the middle child role as demonstrated with this exercise, and with good reason. I had for thirteen years been the middle child in my family, at which point I became the oldest.

We then asked Jean and three other students to try to build the paper airplane. This time my hidden agenda was to have all first borns. The observers indicated that initially they saw pairings by gender. Later on as a group of four what eventually occurred was that Jean appeared to take the major leadership role, though often allowing for one of the other students to also contribute in this way. Of the other two, one played and joked about (youngest?) while the other was silent and watched most of the time (middle?). What was particularly interesting was that after some time, even though they were all the same birth order they eventually established new roles similar to the first group. These new roles appeared to correspond with the amount of siblings each of the participants had in their families of origin; Jean having four, the student she exchanged leadership with having three, and the other two coming from families of two.
While actually doing these activities students were not aware of what specifically was being looked at. Afterwards we as a group attempted to draw some conclusions based on what we had all experienced.

It would seem that there is a strong tendency to maintain behavioral characteristics and power structure as experienced in one's family of origin, and that unknowingly we continue to recreate it all through our lives.

We talked about how having a tendency to always act the same way might cause difficulties when working with others. How we all, instructors included, are stuck in roles that have good and bad aspects (i.e., Always being in charge, always wanting to do everything by yourself, never being allowed to do anything for yourself, being invisible, unseen and unheard, never having to take responsibility for anything, being very independent, having all the control.)
CHAPTER FIVE
REFLECTIONS ON PERSON, PROBLEM AND METHOD

Initially my question was: what do these students really need to know in order to be employable? Taking a very objective stance, I had stood back and watched, looking to see where students would get themselves into trouble if they were in a real job situation. From this point on I have never looked at teaching or my students in quite the same way. My evolving process of action research has taught me much about my students, myself and the social context that we are all trying to work within. Reinharz (1992) comments:

...learning should occur on three levels in any research project: the levels of person, problem and method. By this I meant that the researcher would learn about herself, about the subject matter under study, and about how to conduct research. (p.194)

...on Myself as Teacher/Researcher

In the beginning my initial assumption about my students not performing as well as the normal population and a view of teaching as something "done to students" had influenced me to create a program with a hierarchical structure. From this top down perspective which I reinforced through the use
of one way communication patterns, the language I used, body
language, tone of voice, seating arrangements, labels with
respect to disability, and my choices of materials; specialized
downgraded curriculum, elementary level mathematics and reading, pictures instead of words, I
unintentionally gave messages to students about how I expected them to behave and function. What was I really
saying? Certainly not what I had intended to.

I often feel that to some degree adult special education
instructors have been marginalized, but in my case it has
proven to be an incredible opportunity, in that what I have
chosen to do with my students has to a large degree been
left as my decision. Recognizing that what I had been
choosing to do wasn't working I began to experiment with
other methods. Methods I had learned in Recreational
Therapy, Counseling Psychology courses, and Group Leader
Training. Ones I had successfully used when working as a
Recreational Therapist. Not having to work within specific
guidelines or cover specific content material provided an
opportunity to play different roles (counselor, instructor,
mother) and to focus my energies on other things besides an
academic/vocational skills based curriculum. A marriage of
teaching and counseling strategies changed my approach from
that of "doing to students" to one of "being with students", responsive to their needs, instead of them to mine.

It seems to me that one of the important things I have learned as a result of this research is that no two of my students are the same. There is always something unique about each student which makes it impossible to plan before hand the specific steps that a lesson should follow, identify the activities that will work the best, designate the amount of time the lesson will take, or what the learning objectives will be. Within a social context, it is far too complex to map out a specific plan prior to the experience without recognizing that by doing so, the most important learning for those students, in that classroom, at that moment may be left undiscovered.

Learning environments are alive, not static. To target before hand one set of objectives out of the enormous number of possibilities that exist within a classroom at any given point in time limits the opportunities for many students to discover what is truly of value to them. And what of the numerous learning opportunities for the teacher?

Gordon Wells (1994) states:

...when the students become involved in the teacher's inquiry and the teacher in the students, together they
create a community of inquiry in which all learn with and from each other. (p.273)

Students can learn so much more than just academic/vocational skills based curriculum if we as teachers understand teaching and learning from a different perspective.

... on How Best to Teach Adult Special Education Students in a Pre-Employment Program.

Working from recollections of critical incidents involving students and colleagues, an hour of video taping, documents of the time, and some journal writing, I have spent a considerable length of time attempting to articulate my experiences. Having achieved some degree of satisfaction on this task, I then moved on to reflect critically on these experiences using theories from Action Research (participatory; perspectives of positivist, interpretivist, and critical science; and five interpretivist modes); from Counseling Psychology (family systems theory and client-centered therapy), and Curriculum Theory (social reproduction). Out of these experiences and reflections I
have discovered many fascinating, yet often obvious things, but what does it all mean?

Even from the beginning there existed within me a vague awareness of much of what have become the prominent themes of communication, behavior, patterns, relationships, roles, and structure throughout this paper. I had early on recognized a need to pull us together as a group, to move towards a focus on the learning activities that held the most meaning for my students, and to have relevant curriculum materials. I had an awareness of some influential relationship dynamics and that how we label something is important. I also began to see things from opposing perspectives; strengths and weaknesses, but chose to maintain a focus on strengths.

If students don't feel safe, they choose to do nothing. Having had few opportunities to express their feelings or ideas, they have learned to remain silent. They have learned that others are more powerful, intelligent, better than themselves. This is learning of another kind.

Many of these students have been conditioned to respond in the ways that they do and in order to change this we need to change the environment. Classrooms that look anything like a regular classroom, where teachers spend the majority
of their time standing at the front of the room, students sit in rows working on low level academics, teachers give brief one to one instructions to students as they move around the room or sit at their desks marking, will only get more of the same.

I have often thought that this environment is likely very similar if not a duplication of what many of these students have experienced since the time they were diagnosed as having some kind of disability.

When a parent approaches and relates to a child that has been labeled as handicapped, what do they do differently? How is this difference interpreted and responded to? What does this difference in behavior teach a child? What does this behavior say about the assumptions of the parent?

Kathryn Crawford (1995) states:
According to Vygotsky, consciousness, knowledge and maturing forms of awareness or insight have a social origin, and are mediated through action in a social context. Furthermore, cognitive structures are actually formed as a result of such action. (p.241)
These students all have roles; roles that they have been acting out for many years, roles derived from experiences in a social context that sees them and treats them as inferior. These students have been marginalized, but have no recognition that it can ever be any different.

Over the past six years I have deconstructed my students previous school experiences. I have no desk in the classroom and students sit at tables in small groups. As little as possible of my time is spent at the front of the room. More often I choose to sit with students or move from the back to the side of the room. During the first few years of the program I eliminated almost all of the specially designed materials from our classroom. We have a resource room with books and a computer. I treat my students as people no better, no worse than myself, just different. I focus on the quality of the interactions within the "living" environment of the program and the process by which we seek information together, in contrast to what was originally an oversimplified academic/vocational skills based curriculum.

Lessons which seem to hold the most meaning for these students begin with a question. This must then be connected in a personal way to previous experiences and understandings, which can then be built upon.
Out of their day-to-day experiences, students can be challenged to derive an understanding of who "they" are. It has been my experience that whatever that means to them, they will demonstrate in their behavior. When I work with students to help them change their understanding of a past experience, as their understanding changes so do they.

These experiences have left me with a strong belief that it is the social context; the interrelationships and the roles that we need to focus upon with a view to altering what is unproductive for both our students and ourselves.

Susan Hart (1995) while making reference to her own research suggests that:

...while some ideas emerging from the analysis were individual-specific, others raised questions or suggested possibilities for development that were relevant to all children. This acknowledgement of the potential generalisability of emerging ideas is important, because it means that we can use our study of individuals whose learning concerns us to extrapolate general questions and hypotheses about advance action we might take to offset problems and enhance learning generally. (p.229)
Concurring with the above I believe that there are aspects arising from my research which can be generalized to other programs.

I have found it valuable to do assessments, not to label but to better understand my students. It provides me with more of an awareness of how to meet them at their level of understanding and work from there. Gordon Wells (1994) in *Changing Schools from Within* refers to teaching at a 'micro' level.

In Vygotskian terms, this can be described as 'working in the students' zones of proximal development' (or ZPD), which he defines as the zone with respect to any task between what the student can manage alone and what he or she can achieve with the assistance of a teacher or more knowledgeable peer. (p.266)

Without an awareness of where this zone of proximal development is for each student, much of what is taught or shared with students has a high probability of being lost.

While working with these students, I have often recognized and responded to shifts in their behavior which go between that of working with an adult, to that of working with a child. This is important to recognize as it indicates when to teach academic/vocational skills or to
focus on the personal unresolved issues which surface in relation to activities and people in the environment. When students seem to go back to a child's perspective, a child's way of coping, they need to be met at this reality, one that I believe to be real for that student at that point in time. Attempts to draw the student into your reality will not work. From here teacher and student can work together to first understand the experience, and later to give it new meaning. It is to learning on this level that I have chosen to give priority. Students who have gained a better understanding of themselves seem more able to give full attention to academics and vocational skills training, and are, therefore, more successful in these endeavours.

When I began to recognize that what I had been teaching wouldn't make these students employable, I fell back to a large extent on understandings and experiences from Counseling Psychology courses taken some ten years ago. Courses which had left me with heavy leanings towards Client-Centered Therapy. Recently reviewing Gerald Corey (1982) *Theory and Practice of Counseling and Psychotherapy*, it would seem that my way of working with students is very much rooted here.

He has consistently maintained that there are three conditions for releasing a growth-promoting climate in
which individuals can move forward and become what they are capable of becoming. These conditions are (1) genuineness, or realness; (2) acceptance, or caring; and (3) deep understanding. If these attitudes are communicated by the helper to the one helped, Rogers postulates, these people will become less defensive and more open to the experience within themselves and in their world—and they will behave in ways that are social and constructive. (p. 82)

In assisting students to better understand their often unproductive roles within a social context, I have found that an understanding of systems theory is useful. The strength here being that it is personal, can be linked to student experiences and understandings, and can be used to assess interrelationship patterns of both the present and the past.

The social structure that evolved while doing action research proved to be similar to descriptions of communities of learners, liberatory classrooms, and healthy family systems. Reinharz (1992) states:

To achieve an egalitarian relation, the researcher abandons control and adopts an approach of openness,
reciprocity, mutual disclosure, and shared risk. (p.181)

It would seem that these different disciplines are moving in similar directions with their thinking, although they describe things using different labels or terminology.

All of the latter are described as people working in groups, groups in which "all" of the people at different points in time are learning new things. They experience strong mutual support from one another and are working towards some common goals. The teacher, leader or parent all play similar, but often shifting roles where the intent seems to be to get the rest of the members to think and act for themselves, be responsible for their own work, to be able to stand on their own or when needed, to support each other. Words such as emancipated, empowered, differentiated, independance are used to describe the ideal that each individual is to attain.

To reach this ideal I believe that several things need to exist; a social environment that students can take action within, a common purpose or goal which can be academic and/or vocational skills training, and a focus on learning about the interactions that occur as a way for students to learn more about themselves as learners and as social human beings. As students gain more knowledge and understanding of themselves within a social context they begin taking responsibility for themselves and their actions, a
liberation from their previous roles. Barbara Rogoff (1994) states, "The instructional discourse in a community-of-learners classroom is conversational rather than using the traditional question-response-evaluation format" (p.214).

For my learners, dialogue was the key to the process of change. It was out of continued rational dialogue (ongoing discussions as a way of reaching logical/reasonable conclusions about why we do something the way we do) that new understandings of experiences, new meanings, and new behavior grew.

... on Action Research

McCutcheon and Jung (1990) state that, "While perspectives and methodologies vary, by "action research" here we mean inquiry teachers undertake to understand and improve their own practice" (p.144).

As a way to substantiate my claim of doing action research I will frame my experiences using three perspectives for action research, draw similarities with five interpretivist modes and conclude with a response to some criteria one can use to judge the quality of action research.
McCutcheon and Jung (1990) discuss three perspectives for action research; positivist, interpretivist, and critical science. I believe I have moved through all three, although at this point I see myself as having lingered in the interpretivist perspective the longest.

In the beginning I saw students who did one job at a time, couldn't transfer what they knew about one job to another, and stood still until someone told them what to do. They had difficulty following verbal instructions and their work was often done incorrectly.

McCutcheon and Jung describe a positivistic perspective as:

... working within positivistic propositions that speak to (a) behavior that is determined, generalizable, and modifiable; (b) methods that are considered to be number-oriented, unbiased, and valid. (1990, p. 145-146)

Having a belief that we needed to teach these students something besides skills, as I watched I began to wonder:

Can students tell time?
Can they identify what jobs need to be done?
What do they notice when they are working?
What stops them from identifying when they don't
understand something?

These questions I initially sought to answer by making what I thought were unbiased observations as my students did assigned work. Still assuming that students would learn more slowly and would require an adjusted delivery (simple, slow, step-by-step) in order to learn, I had no doubt in my mind that once I discovered what else they needed to learn and taught it, that these and future students would then be employable.

As time went on, the quality of my questions changed. Seeking answers required a more in-depth look.

Interpretive philosophy often tightropes between investigation and intervention. In investigating the constructs teachers and students use to make sense of their respective worlds, the researcher comes face-to-face with the social situations that reveal such constructs and the taken-for-granted components of such worlds. (McCutcheon & Jung, 1990, p. 146)

I was shifting into an interpretivist perspective demonstrated by a focus on recurring patterns and the interactions between those involved in the program. I began to wonder:
Can students identify how they feel?
Can they describe someone else's behavior?
Can students identify what worked well today?
Can students identify what doesn't work well?
When a conflict arises can students identify who owns the problem?
Can students offer suggestions for change when something doesn't work?
How do we get students to work together as a team?

I began to openly identify and question people's behavior in order to gain some understanding for myself and my students as to what might be happening.

Susan Hart (1995) takes a closer look at the interpretivistic perspective, offering five distinct interpretive modes from which practitioner researchers might analyze their practice. She goes on to suggest that this methodology entails, "... a procedure as rigorous, critical and self-critical as the most exacting (traditional) research process" (p. 228).

What follows is the summarized account of these modes from her article.

The interconnective mode explores possible links between
the child and the learning context, asking "What in this situation might be helping to produce this response?"

The oppositional mode challenges interpretations previously made by offering alternative interpretations of the same evidence, asking "How else might this response be understood?" It seeks to uncover the norms and assumptions underlying a judgment, so that these can be reviewed and evaluated.

The decentered mode encourages us to challenge interpretations made from within the teacher's frame of reference, by inviting us to try to appreciate the meaning and logic of the child's response from the child's point of view. It asks "What meaning and purpose does this activity have for the child?"

The affective mode examines the part that feelings are playing in a situation, and in leading us to arrive at a particular interpretation. It asks "How do I feel about this?" and "What do these feelings tell me about what is going on here?"

The hypothetical mode asks whether there might be a need to suspend judgment for the time being in order to learn more. It asks "What else do I need to do/learn in order
to be able to reach an adequate understanding of this child's learning?" (p. 224)

As evidenced in my writing of incidents with students and questions I've asked myself about what is really going on, I have come to use all of these modes. It has become my practice to look at things from as many different perspectives as possible before I take action. Of the identified modes I have found the affective (my intuition or tacit knowledge) and the hypothetical to be my starting points. Once I have an understanding on this level I move further, questioning from yet other perspectives.

An inquiry arising from the realization that one of my students had begun to repeat many of the same or suspiciously similar stories and situations from the previous year had led me to ask:

What might I learn about students from their behavior?
What do students resist doing?
What do students prefer to do if given a choice?
How does this student organize to do a task?
Does he/she organize in similar ways with new tasks?
What does their behavior indicate they might be good at?
What purpose does a behavior pattern serve?
When did this behavior first start?
What does this behavior mean?
What purpose did this behavior serve then and is it serving now?

Arising from Simon's statement about a difference in student levels of performance when I was away from the program, motivated me to take a closer look at myself. What did I do differently when working with students? Comparing myself with my co-instructor I sought to understand:

Was there a difference in the way we communicated?
What did we do differently?
What did we do the same?
What kinds of things did we say?
How did we say it?
What did the body language look like?
Are students responding to words or body language or both?
What words and body language do students respond to most favorably?

My own experiences and theories from Family Therapy had taught me to look at interactions as recursive, and groups of people as a whole in which each person is playing a role. From this perspective it was easier to view my students as something other than handicapped. As I gained familiarity
with these new interpretations, I began asking questions like:

What did our students' families of origin look like?
Were they playing out some of their past history in the program?
Were we, the instructors, playing out any of our past history?
What are common personality traits of first born, middle, youngest, and only children?
Are there predominantly more of one birth order than another in this program?
What birth orders seek each other out when asked to form a group?
What happens when you put all one birth order in a group?

Of late I have moved more towards a critical science perspective described by McCutcheon and Jung (1990) as:

... a concerted effort to re-examine the taken-for-granted and institutionalized constraints of schooling such as scheduling, compartmentalization of subject matter, and discouragement of rational dialogue between teacher and student. (p.147-148)
Questioning first my own behavior, I sought to understand:

Why did I use different kinds of language when describing two of my students?
What is the difference between the language I use to describe one student and the language I use for another?
How does my choice of language effect my students?
What does this say about me?
How does this thinking influence my behavior?

I have since moved on to ask questions like:

Who is the present system really serving?
Whose needs are really being met?
What are we really teaching?
How can I influence a change outside my own classroom?

To judge the quality of action research Altrichter et al (1993) suggest that there are four important criteria:

Have the understandings gained from the research been cross-checked against the perspectives of all those concerned and/or other researchers? (p.74)

Have the understandings gained from research been tested
through practical action? (p.77)

Are the research methods compatible with both educational aims and democratic human values? (p.77)

Are the research design and data collection compatible with the demands of teaching? (p.80)

Responding to the latter questions, I feel that my action research practices meet the expectations Altrichter et al suggest.

In accordance with ethical procedures laid out for this research, after the completing the writing of the first four chapters I returned to Jean and Simon to seek their feedback. They both gave favorable responses indicating approval and a match with their own recollections of events. When the final chapter was complete I met with colleagues and students to share and seek their responses. Simon commented that as he read, it stimulated yet more possibilities. Jean felt that in the rereading she had become aware of different levels of understanding suggesting that it could be just a story, but it was also insightful about what really goes on in the program that most people never see. It also offered a clearer understanding of me, herself and those around her which she felt had in some ways been a healing process. The students all indicated
agreement with the experiences I had written about. Crystal who read the entire paper came back with two pages of written comments. She concurred with my thoughts on her being influenced by those around her and we discussed the power that certain words seemed to hold. Overall she stated that it had been informative, even painful in places, stimulating a plethora of thoughts.

Cross-checking perspectives with students and co-workers was and is still routinely done in our program. New understandings are tested and re-tested during the day-to-day workings in the classroom and in the kitchen. Educational aims try to capture both what is important to the student as well as important to the institution, and democratic values are central in my philosophy of teaching. Of greatest significance to me is that this research methodology has become my teaching methodology, thus making it totally compatible with the demands of teaching as I now understand them to be. However, I wish to recognize that I have been fortunate in having had co-workers, who without their continued support, I may never have had the opportunity to observe, reflect and take action to quite the same degree.

What occurred as a result of this Action Research process seems in some respects to be a journey I've taken
before. One taken in my personal life, where having experienced a safe and caring environment I had the opportunity to learn about myself and to discover what worked best for me. Since having experienced this, I find myself continually striving to recreate and maintain something similar for myself and those around me. The methodology of action research, one of questioning, analysing, reflecting and acting as a way of informing and changing practice has in my mind also become my teaching methodology. As I model an action research, question/action spiral in the day to day happenings of the program I encourage students to do the same. This process allows me to maintain a safe and caring environment where all those within have the opportunity to find their own way and to share and learn with others.

Going back to McCutcheon and Jung (1990) and their description of action research as, "inquiry teachers undertake to understand and improve their own practice" (p.144), I believe that the research I conducted over the six years described, although it was constantly changing perspectives and methodology was action research, as I continually analyzed, reflected on and changed my practice.
...Quest(ion)ing

At present Simon, Jean and myself can still be found working with students in the Seniors' Centre where customers are now greeted by students dressed in traditional black and white. The tables are adorned with dusty rose tablecloths with flowered centerpieces. Once guests are seated they are offered a menu and a choice of something to drink. Through the window into the kitchen, awaiting orders are the kitchen staff dressed in white uniforms with chef hats. Students perform all restaurant jobs; waiter/waitress, bus person, cashier, dishwasher, salad chef, cook, grill cook, and expediter. The restaurant is open for breakfast and lunch four days a week, offering ten short order items in addition to the daily soup and special. We also provide banquet and coffee service for workshops on a fairly regular basis. Students have a lot to do with the planning and organization of their own work; menus, daily specials, banquets, and workshop service. We can and do function like a real restaurant. Who would have thought that these students would have been capable of achieving so much?

It has become my perspective that what goes on in a classroom, in a program or in any social context is incredibly complex. One needs to address issues of social
structure, the roles and the inter-relationships that occur within an environment to uncover what hinders learning, rather than conveniently attaching a physical, behavioral or emotional cause to a single person. What dictates the social structure, the roles and the inter-relations which occur are rooted in the understandings and meanings that each individual puts to their experiences in life. Our understanding and meanings are constructed out of our communications/interactions with one another. New understandings lead to new behavior, new roles. New understandings can arise out of dialoguing to deconstruct old understandings and then reconstruct new meaning.

I have come a long way from my initial assumption that a step by step lesson focused on academic/vocational skills was the best way to teach adult special education students.

At this point in my journey, which I see as still unfolding, I have recently turned my thoughts to some broader questions. Do the findings from my research have implications with respect to what goes on in "regular" classrooms, schools, and work environments? If so, for me it raises questions about the practice of mainstreaming as it is presently being done and about the relationship dynamics between the so called "adult special education
students" and the people who work directly with them (teachers, aides, care workers, nurses, parents). Further exploration into environments outside the segregated classroom seems warranted. How many different people are involved with one student? How many of these unknowingly support or maintain the existence of these students at low functional levels?
REFERENCES


