Teaching/ Learning Experiences: Meanings Constructed by Participants in a Degree Completion Program for Adult Students

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TEACHING/LEARNING EXPERIENCES:
MEANINGS CONSTRUCTED BY PARTICIPANTS
IN A DEGREE COMPLETION PROGRAM
FOR ADULT STUDENTS

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TEACHING/LEARNING EXPERIENCES:
MEANINGS CONSTRUCTED BY PARTICIPANTS
IN A DEGREE COMPLETION PROGRAM
FOR ADULT STUDENTS

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Instructional Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
in the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education
National-Louis University

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning that teachers and their adult students construct of their classroom experiences and to see how those meanings impact the teaching/learning process. Because of the multiple factors affecting an educational experience, this study took the view that this should be explored in a holistic way. Most educational research focuses on the teacher’s perspective, with students and their learning considered as the result of the educational process. In order to more fully understand what is occurring in classrooms and what students are actually learning, it is important to ascertain student perceptions of their learning, and its relative value to them.

This was a case study done in the naturalistic, ethnographic mode. The adult learners in one cohort of a non-traditional degree completion program were interviewed as to their understanding of what was occurring in class, what they were learning, and what aspects of their experience were important to them. Three specific course modules of this program were used as the basis of the student interviews. In addition, the teachers for each of these modules were interviewed to obtain their understanding of what was occurring in the classroom and what they perceived the students were learning. These sets of
interviews were then compared to see what common understandings were revealed by both teachers and students.

The key aspects that these adult students understood and perceived as important to their classroom experience and to their learning were 1) their relationship to the teacher, 2) their relationship to the other students in the cohort, and 3) their own personal life issues or concerns; and least important was 4) content or subject matter. The teachers similarly perceived the relationship that they developed with their students as important and essential to encouraging growth and change in their students. With this emphasis on relationships, these results suggest that when designing learning experiences for adult students that affective and cognitive issues need to be taken into consideration. In addition, the impact of the cohort and the teacher on individual student learning needs to be examined more fully.
Dedicated to the memory of my sister,
Jane Ellen Manbeck,
whose tragic and untimely death made me realize the importance and significance of life and the value of making a contribution to humankind and the field of education.
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To all my professors, colleagues, co-workers, fellow students, and friends at National-Louis University whose
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

As the noted theorist and researcher in cognitive psychology and literacy, Frank Smith (1993) once said, "human beings are meaning makers." This view is also shared by Howard Gardner, who said in a recent interview on learning for understanding, that children are "trying during their early years, to make sense of the world" (Steinberger, 1994, p. 27). The human brain seems to be set up to make sense out of the myriad of stimuli that bombard it every day. At any one point in time, how individuals make sense of the world is influenced by a number of factors; such as, their personality, their cognitive style, their past experiences, their beliefs and values, their present condition, and their culture to name just a few. In addition, human beings tend to categorize the information they receive which aids them in processing new information faster. As Piaget points out, when new information doesn’t fit an existing category, human beings either revise the existing category to include the new information or create a new category (Ginsburg and Opper, 1988). In support of this
idea, Merriam (1989) also indicates in her review of adult learning and theory building that, "when something happens we either develop a new ... construct, or we modify our perceptions of the experience" (Candy, 1980, p. 9)" (p. 195).

In attempting to make sense out of the teaching/learning experience for adult learners, this research will be taking Frank Smith's (1993) advice that in order to change education something different needs to be done, and that educational researchers need to become explorers and navigators. It is the intent of this research to explore and search for the meaning that students and teachers make of their educational experiences.

Since one of the purposes of adult education is to encourage growth and the development of the individual, this search for meaning is particularly well suited to the area of adult education. As Paterson (1979) explains,

The education of adults is the attempt to foster the development of grown men and women as persons, and this, we have argued, consists essentially in the fostering of their continued growth as centres of awareness, as conscious selves who perceive, feel, imagine, judge, appreciate, and understand more fully, more sensitively, and more profoundly than ever before. To develop a man's awareness is to put him in closer and more meaningful touch with reality, to give him a surer and more comprehensive grasp of his condition and that of his fellows, and is thus best expressed in terms of deepening and extending his knowledge: a man's pursuit of education, we have claimed, is his pursuit of knowledge in all its principal forms, for in building up richer and more finely wrought structures of knowledge and understanding a man is building up his very being as a centre of awareness, as a mind. (p. 155)
This seeking to expand understanding and awareness of phenomena and constructing and reconstructing meaning out of that understanding on the part of the adult is also a view shared by Merriam (1989), and Mezirow (1991).

In fact, this desire to derive meaning out of experiences formed the basis for both Knowles' (1984) and Mezirow's (1991) theories of adult learning. Malcolm Knowles' (1984) seminal work on an andragogical theory of adult learning is based on four key assumptions about adults and their learning. These assumptions are: that an adult's self-concept becomes more self-directed, that an adult’s experience base provides a "rich resource for learning, and at the same time provides him with a broadening base to which to relate new learnings" (p. 17), that an adult’s readiness to learn is based on a need to know, and that "adults tend to have a problem-centered orientation to learning" (p. 18). Mezirow’s (1991) theory of adult learning focuses on learning as a transformative experience where adults "reinterpret an old experience (or a new one) from a new set of expectations, thus giving a new meaning and perspective to the old experience" (p. 11). It is through this process of reinterpretation that an adult’s thinking is transformed. In a review of the theories of adult learning, Merriam (1989) found common components regarding adult learning. These included the following:

(a) self-direction/autonomy as a characteristic or as a goal of adult learning;
(b) the relationship of experiences, especially those of adult life to learning;
(c) the importance of reflection upon one's own learning; and
(d) action as some sort of necessary expression of the learning that has occurred. (Merriam, 1989, p. 29)

In addition to being experience based and individualistic in its approach to learning, adult education values the multiple constructions of reality and meaning that are attached to learning. In fact, Lindeman (1984) points out that "its purpose is to put meaning into the whole of life" (p. 19), or as Mezirow (1991) states, "making meaning is central to what learning is all about" (p. 11). Because of this focus, the investigation of the meaning adults construct of the teaching/learning experience is well suited to the area of adult education.

Research Questions

Wherever education is taking place and especially in adult education, teachers and learners are trying to make sense out of the multiple factors that are part of the teaching/learning situation, and as such are attaching meaning to the experiences they have in that environment. What things are they focusing on? What does the information they encounter mean to them? Are they prejudging certain things and why? Are teachers and students even aware of how they derive or attach meaning and the factors that affect it? How do all of these perceptions and meanings affect
teaching and learning? These are just a few of the questions that come to mind when looking at teachers and learners and the meaning they attach to the teaching/learning experience. In exploring the meaning that teachers and students attach to the teaching/learning situation, this research is an attempt to understand the complexity involved in the interaction between teacher and student as it relates to learning. Hopefully, insights will be gained into the multitude of factors that lead to effective teaching and learning.

The purpose of the following study was to explore the teaching/learning experience with a specific focus on the meaning that both teachers and students construct of that experience, and to see how that experience and the meaning attached to it have an impact on the teaching/learning process. More specifically the two questions guiding this research were:

1) What aspects of the teaching/learning experience were perceived as meaningful or important to the participants, and

2) How did that perception have an impact on the teaching/learning process?

Additional questions arose as the research progressed, and provided a means of understanding these two general research questions. These questions were:
3) What aspects did the students perceive as meaningful or important?

4) What aspects did the teachers perceive as meaningful or important?

5) What were the similarities and differences between the perceptions of the students and the teachers as to what was meaningful or important?

6) What impact did the students' perceptions of what was meaningful have on their learning?

7) What impact did the teachers' perceptions of what was meaningful have on their teaching?

Numerous studies have pointed to specific factors that influence the teaching/learning experience, such as personality types, learning styles, and methods of instruction. However, no specific factor in isolation has proven to have a significant impact on all teaching situations. This study took the alternative view that these factors interact and should be explored in an holistic way. In addition to approaching this study holistically, its primary concern was the meaning that teachers and students constructed of this complex endeavor.

Although the above purpose is broad in scope, this particular investigation was limited to specifically selected instructors and one student group in the Applied Behavioral Science (ABS) program at National-Louis University (NLU). This program is a degree completion
program presented in a non-traditional, field experience format for students who have completed at least two years of their undergraduate education. Utilization of the ABS program is particularly attractive because students are grouped as cohorts and experience a number of different teachers during the course of the ABS program of study. On the other hand, ABS instructors usually teach the same course in the ABS curriculum but to different cohorts of students. This exposure to a variety of different cohorts of students adds a richness to the experience of the instructors. Since this study looked at the meaning that both teachers and students constructed of their educational experience, these insights into a variety of students by the instructors and a variety of instructors by the students will hopefully provide valuable information on the dynamic that exists when teachers and students encounter each other in a teaching/learning situation.

Understandings of Terms

Teaching

Although this research explored the constructed meaning of some complex concepts and as such was looking for varied and multiple understandings of these concepts, it is important to provide an initial understanding of some of those components. The first and most prevalent concept in education to be dealt with in this research is that of teaching. Teaching has generally been regarded as something
that is done to students. Its primary function has been the imparting of knowledge. However, for the purposes of this research, teaching is a dynamic that occurs between teacher and learner and is seen as a collaborative endeavor. Or as Paterson (1979) states,

In teaching someone something we are not injecting a truth into his passive and waiting consciousness. Rather, we are making a truth visible to him by placing it before him, manifest and uncovered, and inviting him to contemplate it. (p. 172)

Teaching then involves encouraging and stimulating learning in the learner.

Learning

Since learning is so intricately entwined with teaching and to some (Knowles, 1984; and Merriam, 1989) is the heart of education, an initial understanding of this concept is important as well. Learning is not a commodity that a student acquires or possesses. Instead, it is something that develops and grows with influences from multiple sources, such as past experiences, personality characteristics, beliefs and values and present conditions. In essence, "learning, we may conclude - of all kinds and at all levels - is essentially a becoming-aware" (Paterson, 1979, p. 165).

Meaning

Aside from the fact that the teaching/learning experience is a complex interaction involving a number of factors, a key element of this research deals with the
concept of meaning. Determining a definition of meaning has eluded philosophers, psychologists, semanticists, educators and human beings in general for centuries. In fact, Creelman (1966) did an extensive review of the literature in the field of psychology on studies related to discovering what meaning is. She found that "attempts at the psychological definition of meaning have ranged from the simple notion of its being the accumulated content of experience to the equally simple notion of its being the response to a given stimulus" (p. 30). It was not the purpose of this research to provide a definitive definition of the word meaning even within the specific context of education. However, an intuitive understanding of meaning is essential to this investigation.

Since in this study education was considered to be a social endeavor which involves communication and the symbolic process, the understanding of meaning for the purposes of this research was influenced by a communication aspect. One of the most important concepts in communication is that meaning lies within the individual and not in the symbols used by individuals. According to Wiseman and Barker (1967), symbols are "only representations of events in the real world" (p. 94). It is the individual who then interprets and reacts to those symbols based on his past experience, life orientation, present conditions and future needs or desires. Mezirow (1991) also sees that "meaning is
an interpretation" (p. 11), and goes on to describe how "we have to sort through our past experiences, that is, the alternative interpretations currently available to us, in order to assess what is relevant" (p. 12). Or as Collins (1984) states, "no two people experience the same situation in exactly the same way" (p. 184).

Second, meaning is also negotiated and affected by others. The context has a strong influence on the meaning attached to symbols. Lindeman (1984) also questioned, "in what areas do most people appear to find life's meaning? We have only one pragmatic guide: meaning must reside in the things for which people strive, the goals which they set for themselves, their wants, needs, desires, and wishes" (p. 21). Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, meaning is the significance that individuals attach to an event based on their past experiences, on their life orientation (personality, beliefs and values), on their present conditions (context, environment) and their future needs and expectations. The meaning so constructed was viewed in this study through the use of questions regarding the relationship of a teaching or learning experience to a person's past experience, life orientation, present conditions and future needs and expectations.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Compared to the wealth of information on the teaching and learning of children, the study of adult learners has only recently become of interest in the field of education. It was not until 1971 that the theory of andragogy or the teaching of adults was introduced to the United States by Malcolm Knowles (1984). His theory provided the impetus for looking at adult learning. Because of the relative newness of this field of study, the research in this area has not been as extensive as in other areas of education. According to Lindsay (1984), the research in adult education has been limited in the research methodologies it has employed and in its focus on outcomes. The research methodologies seem to have been limited to case studies and surveys with little or no experimental or ethnographic research. Lindsay also found when looking at an aggregate of adult education research on teacher effectiveness that it was "readily apparent that the fundamental knowledge, skill and personality characteristics for instructors of adults do not
differ markedly from fundamental characteristics for effective instructors of children and adolescents" (p. 3). Kowalski (1984) also found that some of the believed differences between children and adults, especially involving intelligence, did not exist. He even found that "variation in instructional modes to meet specific needs (e.g., type of students, nature of learning task, etc.) seems as necessary for adults as it is with pre-adults" (p. 10). Since the particular population that was the focus of my research had not been researched extensively especially in the ethnographic sense and was similar in many respects to children and adolescents, the following review of the literature was expanded to include broader issues of theory on the teaching/learning experience.

The research on teaching and learning appeared to be just as vast and complex as the experience itself. As Frank Smith (1995) described it, "Education has always been too big to control, to comprehend, or even to imagine in all its detail" (p. 587). In order to make sense of the myriad of information available on this subject, it became necessary to focus on specific aspects of this literature. Since the perspective of teachers and students was essential to this research endeavor, a review of the literature on these two components seemed logical. Not only were the perspectives of teachers and students important, but research on teaching in higher education provided valuable insights into the more
specific focus of this research. Finally, research that looked at education holistically seemed to provide support for the method of approaching this inquiry.

Research on Teaching

Teacher Effectiveness

Most of the research encountered on teaching focused mainly on teacher effectiveness in improving outcomes of elementary and high school students which was not surprising since improvement of education has prompted a great deal of educational research. According to Good and McCaslin (1992), teacher effectiveness research has evolved over the years. Its original intent was to ascertain the characteristics of effective teachers possibly for evaluation purposes. In the early 1950's, Manbeck (1953) conducted research on the characteristics of effective teachers. His investigation, which involved surveys of high school students and principals, revealed that it was much easier to describe negative characteristics of teachers than to determine positive characteristics.

Due to the fairly inconclusive results of the 1950's regarding the correlation between teacher characteristics and student achievement, research on teacher effectiveness then shifted in the late 1960's to early 1970's to a focus on teacher behavior or techniques that teachers used. Even this focus on teacher behavior became too narrow, and "researchers now study dynamic models of active teaching,
which recognize that teachers must adapt instruction to individual differences in students, who mediate and transform learning opportunities, and at times reteach or provide enrichment" (Good and McCaslin, 1992, p. 1373).

With this expanded focus on the process of teaching, current research has attempted to investigate the teacher's perspective on what is happening in classrooms. This new focus on teachers has led to a variety of studies on such things as teachers' intentions (Clark and Peterson, 1986; Good and Brophy, 1974), and teachers' decision making (Shavelson, 1987; Shulman, 1986). A particularly interesting study on teacher decision making was conducted through the Institute for Research on Teaching, and investigated teachers' thoughts while teaching undergraduate college students (McNair and Joyce, 1979). This research was originally designed to determine what decisions teachers were making while they were teaching, but ended up looking at what teachers were thinking as they taught. In essence, McNair and Joyce (1979) found that teachers' thinking involved adjusting to student responses throughout the lesson they were conducting, and to concerns about such things as content, student learning, attitudes, behavior, and procedures. This illustrated the multitude of thoughts and decisions that a teacher faces every minute of every class.
Another area of teacher effectiveness looked at teaching styles. A review of the literature by Silvernail (1986) highlighted four different types of teaching styles. These included the direct and indirect teaching styles and the formal and informal styles. The direct and the formal styles focused mainly on teacher control while the indirect and informal styles were geared more toward encouraging the participation of students. The research related to these styles was inconclusive and the conclusion that was drawn was "that a single teaching style is not appropriate for all learning tasks" (Silvernail, 1986, p. 15). It was also concluded that the effectiveness of a particular style depended on "time factors, the flexibility of the teacher, and the nature of the learning tasks" (Silvernail, 1986, p. 16). Lindsay (1984) also found this to be true with teachers of adults who "adjust their behaviors according to the changing needs of the teaching context" (p. 4). In adjusting to the teaching context, it was found that "teachers tend to draw on responsive or learner-centered behaviors when teaching adults and controlling or teacher-centered behaviors when teaching pre-adults" (Lindsay, 1984, p. 4). However, Good and Brophy (1987) did not see this difference. As they pointed out, "there is no simple definition of effective teaching or good teachers. For one thing, teachers' personal attributes interact with their general competence and teaching style to determine outcomes"
Once again it was evident that teaching was a complex interrelated enterprise that could not be broken down into component parts.

This focus on the teacher's perspective on what was happening in classrooms has encouraged teachers to reflect on their own practice. To give teachers a way of looking at behavior in classrooms, Good and Brophy (1987) have written a book, *Looking in Classrooms*, which was replete with ways for elementary and secondary school teachers to become more aware of what was happening in their classrooms. To further validate this type of reflective research, Schon (1991) compiled a number of case studies based on teachers' reflections entitled *The Reflective Turn: Case Studies in and on Educational Practice*. Although Schon (1991) considered a broader definition of educational practice and reflection to include case studies outside of pre-collegiate settings, these studies also validated teachers and others in their reflection on practice and action. Both of these books have been important in supporting practitioners as they reflected on their practices, but with their emphasis on the practitioner minimal attention was devoted to others involved in the same experience.

**Teacher Perceptions**

Aside from teacher effectiveness, another area where teacher behavior has been studied was in the perceptions teachers have of their students. More specifically, this
refers to the work of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) on the Pygmalion Effect. This effect was essentially a self-fulfilling prophesy where a teacher’s expectations of students’ behavior became the reality. In this study, "20 percent of the children in a certain elementary school were reported to their teachers as showing unusual potential for intellectual growth" (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968, p. vii). At the end of the school year, these children were tested and found to have "significantly greater gains in IQ than did the remaining children who had not been singled out for the teachers’ attention" (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968, p. vii). These results seemed to indicate that how a teacher perceived a student could have an effect on subsequent evaluation of that same student and possibly an effect on that student’s achievement.

Other researchers (Elashoff and Snow, 1971; Cooper and Good, 1983) have revisited the Pygmalion study. Both of these subsequent studies found the Pygmalion study to be flawed, due mainly to the use of IQ measurements as a measure of student achievement. However, the Pygmalion study did open up a new area of research on teacher expectations with some interesting results. First of all, additional research found that "teacher expectancy may affect pupil achievement" (Elashoff and Snow, 1971, p. 61), especially if the expectation was strong or occurred naturally, and if the teacher controls the measure of
achievement. Cooper and Good (1983) expanded on this finding by looking at how teachers' behavior toward students was affected by their beliefs about "the performance levels of individual students and about personal control over students" (p. 154). This research indicated that how a person perceived a situation could be affected by their underlying beliefs about that situation. Because of this profound effect on behavior and perception, both of these studies recommended finding out more about what teachers believe and think.

In general, the research on teachers and teaching has focused on teacher behavior or thought processes that have an impact on student achievement. Although Cooper and Good (1983) seemed to be headed in a promising direction with looking at teachers' beliefs, none of these studies looked at the meaning that teachers attached to the teaching/learning situation, or the multiplicity of responses and perceptions that teachers have to that situation. This suggested that a more in-depth examination of what was going on from the teacher's perspective was needed.

Research on Learning

Not only was it necessary to look at the teacher's view of what was happening in the classroom, but it was just as important to consider the students' perspective. Unfortunately, as Good and McCaslin (1992) pointed out "few studies have detailed students' perceptions and covert
thinking during such learning activities" (p. 1385). The studies that do exist have focused mainly on student thought processes or ways of conceptualizing content, or learning styles. However, a few studies have focused on unintentional learning that occurred around the specified content. The need to consider student perceptions of and the meaning they attach to the teaching/learning experience appeared evident.

Student Thought Processes

The research on student thought processes turned the focus of the research away from what the teacher or the instructional process was doing to the student and recognized the student's active role in the process. As Wittrock (1986) pointed out "research on students' thought processes examines how teaching or teachers influence what students think, believe, feel, say, or do that affects their achievement" (p. 297). Studies in this area covered such things as academic self-concept and expectation; perception of schools, teachers and teachers' behavior; and perceptions of classroom and cognitive processes. In addition, student cognitive processes or conceptions of specific subject matters, such as math and science, revealed important information on how students' previous experience and knowledge affected their learning (Confrey, 1990). All of these studies found that how a student perceived the
elements of the teaching/learning experience had an effect on achievement.

Unintentional Learning

Research into student thought processes revealed that students often perceive things differently from their teachers and from one another. In other words, "the instruction experienced by the learners may be different from the intended instruction" (Wittrock, 1986, p. 298). Because of this difference in perception, it then became important to look at the unintentional learning that occurs in the teaching/learning experience. Weiss (1980) reviewed the research on assessing nonconventional outcomes of schooling of elementary and secondary students and found the area fairly limited. He found that only a few of the outcomes were actually assessed. These included: "basic cognitive skills, subject-matter achievement, attitude towards school, and self-concept" (p. 446). He also found that these outcomes were usually assessed either with standardized achievement tests or Likert-type scales. Mealman (1991) used a naturalistic approach to assessing unintentional learning with adult students and was able to obtain more in-depth information on the unintentional learning that occurred and what factors encouraged its occurrence. Some of his findings revealed that these adult students learned how to learn, learned more about themselves and others, and learned to value continued education (p.129).
Some of the factors that encouraged unintentional learning to occur were small group activities, class climate, and the structure of the program which emphasized personal application of concepts learned.

**Learning Styles**

Studies on student thought processes and unintentional learning pointed out the variety of responses, and perceptions that students have toward the learning experience. In order to explain these differences, a number of studies have been conducted regarding student learning styles. Most of these studies were also looking for ways to improve student achievement by altering the instructional process to fit the student’s learning style.

Because of the individuality and uniqueness of human beings in the way they learn, it has been difficult to define "learning styles." According to Cornett (1983), learning styles are "overall patterns that give general direction to learning behavior" (p. 9). Reiff (1992) used a similar definition and added that it could also be "described as a set of factors, behaviors, and attitudes that facilitate learning for an individual in a given situation" (p. 7). Dunn and Griggs (1988) consider it to be "a biologically and developmentally imposed set of characteristics that make the same teaching method wonderful for some and terrible for others" (p. 3) Although it has been difficult to determine a specific definition, most
researchers would agree that learning styles involve a multitude of factors that indicate an individual's preference for one particular way of learning over another.

In addition to these general definitions of learning styles, Cornett (1983), Dunn and Griggs (1988) and Reiff (1992), as well as other researchers, considered three aspects or categories of learning styles as important. These were the cognitive, affective and physiological aspects. The cognitive aspect or style pertained to a person's perception or reception of information, and how that information was processed, stored and remembered. This aspect, according to Reiff (1992) included such things as brain dominance, conceptual tempo, mindstyles, psychological differentiation, multiple intelligences, and modalities. The affective aspect involved the emotional and personality preferences of an individual, and the physiological aspect focused on physical and environmental needs. Although these provide general categories for classifying learning styles, it was interesting to note that what each category encompassed was debatable. For example, learning modalities involving the senses were classified as a cognitive style by Reiff (1992) and as a physiological style by Cornett (1983). It was possible that this discrepancy occurred due to the lapse of time between the two reviews with the categories becoming more defined as more research was completed. Although these categories appeared as specific and distinct,
there was a great deal of overlap and interaction between
and among these categories. Because of the complex nature
of learning styles and the multitude of factors that
contribute to an individual's distinct style, each
individual presented a unique dynamic learning style
profile.

Most of the research on learning styles focused on
improving elementary and secondary student learning and
achievement through matching teaching styles with learning
styles. In general, it was found that when the teaching
style was matched to a student's learning style, student
learning improved. For example, some studies reviewed by
Dunn, Beaudry, and Klavas (1989) even found that most of the
elementary and high school students who did poorly in school
were kinesthetic, because most instruction in schools was
gleared toward the auditory learner. These students with a
preference for the kinesthetic learning modality were found
to be more successful when taught with teaching strategies
that employed a variety of different modalities. This
seemed to indicate that basing instruction on these learning
modalities and styles would enhance student achievement.

Since adult learners have been characterized as self-
directed, and experientially focused, the area of learning
styles has gained popularity in the field of adult
education. Of particular importance has been the work of
David Kolb (1981), who developed a four-stage learning model
to describe the learning process of adults. This model "states that learning over a variety of tasks and environments requires abilities that are polar opposites. As a result, the learner must continually choose which set of learning abilities to apply on various learning tasks" (Birkey, 1984, p. 27). Similar to the work with children's learning styles, this work on adult learning styles and processes also emphasized the uniqueness of the individual and that learning styles were affected by "our individual hereditary characteristics, our particular past experiences, and the demands of our present environment" (Birkey, 1984, p. 27).

In general, the research on learning and learners has focused on thought processes, unintentional learning or learning styles. All of these have been related to their impact on student learning, achievement or understanding. Although the research on unintentional learning lent a broader view to the teaching/learning experience, none of these studies looked at what it meant to a student to have a particular learning style or thought process or unintentional learning. Just as teachers have multiple responses, perceptions and beliefs about the teaching/learning experience, so do students. Again this suggested that a more in-depth examination of what is going on and what it means from the student's perspective was needed. In fact, in a recent review of adult education theory, Cranton
(1994) pointed out that even the most recent adult education theorist, Mezirow, "has not yet examined his more comprehensive theory from the learner's perspective" (p. 63). In a personal conversation with Mezirow (October 14, 1994), he corroborated that statement and was very interested in research from the learner's perspective.

Research on Teaching in Higher Education

Since this present study examined students pursuing a degree at an institution of higher education, it was important to consider the research on teaching in higher education. In many ways, the research on teaching in higher education followed the same pattern as research on teaching and learning. Dunkin and Barnes (1986), in their review of research on teaching in higher education, examined the research on various methods of teaching, on various teaching behaviors, and on ways to evaluate and improve teaching in higher education. Of the various methods of teaching used in higher education, which included social interaction, individualized, and the Keller Plan, it was generally found that these innovative methods were superior to traditional classroom methods "when student achievement is the criterion" (Dunkin and Barnes, 1986, p. 759). This was also supported by a review of the research conducted by McKeachie and Kulik (1975). Although innovative methods seemed superior, McKeachie and Kulik (1975) did not find educational technology to be as effective possibly because
they found that "student interaction is an important variable affecting college level learning" (p. 189).

Not only were methods considered in this type of research, but teacher behaviors related to content and socio-emotional issues were investigated. Content related behaviors focused on types of interactions and questions asked by teachers. The results of these studies indicated that teacher behavior, especially in the types of questions asked, largely determined the cognitive level at which students operated (Dunkin and Barnes, 1986). In the affective realm, the occurrence of socio-emotional behaviors by teachers in higher education was minimal and students seemed to take a more passive role in their learning. However, one interesting study found that not only did positive teacher behaviors enhance student behavior, but that students could encourage positive teacher behavior and thus take a more active role in the direction of their own learning (Dunkin and Barnes, 1986).

Finally, although student evaluation has been an important area of research in higher education, the credibility of students in evaluating instruction was still doubted. In fact, "the evidence concerning the credibility of student evaluations of teaching has more often been based on associations with actual teaching processes than has the evidence of the usefulness of student evaluations in improving instruction" (Dunkin and Barnes, 1986, p. 772).
As with the other research on teaching and learning, most of the focus of research in higher education has been on teacher and student behaviors that influence achievement and little if anything has been researched on how teachers and students perceive this experience. However, as Dunkin and Barnes (1986) noted the "most surprising aspect of research on teaching in higher education is that its contribution to the improvement of teaching has not been evaluated" (p. 774).

Conclusions

Most of the research on teacher and student perceptions of the educational process focused on the outcome or end product of that process, but few looked at the meaning that teachers and students attached to the process. Some researchers looked at students' attitudes toward education or a particular educational method, but this still did not get at the core of what this educational experience meant to students. By looking at outcomes, even teachers who reflected on their practice tended to focus not on what this experience meant to them and possibly what it might mean to their students, but on their own behavior and what happened when that behavior changed and what was the aggregate result from the students.

By focusing on outcomes, what was really happening in the teaching/learning experience became lost. This research focus did not take into consideration that a student might
be having difficulty at home with a personal problem and was either not paying attention to what was going on at school or was focused on things in school that related to that personal problem. The whole purpose of an assignment or academic lesson could be lost on a student because it did not fit their belief system or was not presented in a way that they could make sense out of or had meaning for them. There might be a whole host of other things that occur in classrooms from the lighting, space, and temperature of the room to personal habits that could have an effect on the meaning that teachers and students derive from their educational experience. The richness of this experience would be lost if it was translated only into student achievement or outcomes. Since meaning and its construction are highly individualistic, understanding meaning would provide a much more complete picture of what is actually going on in the classrooms.

Since most of the research on the teaching/learning experience has focused on outcomes and not meaning, this research endeavor should provide some valuable insights into the process of education. In addition, most of the studies focused on one or a series of characteristics that might affect learning, but did not consider multiple factors that affected teachers and students simultaneously and impinged on the meaning they derived from their experience. At this time only one study by Weston (1993) called The Experienced
Curriculum in Two Elementary Classrooms: An Exploration in Student Lore, was found that looked at both the students' and the teachers' perspective or the holistic view of the teaching/learning experience. Even this extensive study did not look at the meaning that adult students attach to their learning. Because of this lack of information, this investigation was conducted in an attempt to provide some valuable insights into this unique experience.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Statement of the Problem

Since the purpose of this research was to gain an interpretive understanding of the meaning both students and instructors construct of their teaching/learning experience, a case study of a cohort group of adult students enrolled in the Applied Behavioral Science degree completion program at National-Louis University in the Evanston/Skokie area and three of their instructors was conducted. More specifically, the purpose of the following study was to explore the teaching/learning experience with a particular focus on the meaning that both teachers and students constructed of that experience, and how that experience and the meaning attached to it had an impact on the teaching/learning process.

Participants

The participants in this study were a cohort group of twelve students in the Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS) degree completion program. The range in age was from 22-69
years old with the majority falling within the 35-50 age range. In the past most of the cohort groups in the Evanston/Skokie geographical area have been comprised of a majority of female students with little ethnic diversity. As was expected, this cohort group was pre-dominantly female with eleven females and one male. To provide a modicum of confidentiality, these students will be identified in the remainder of the paper by the use of pseudonyms. Unlike previous groups in this region, this group was more ethnically diverse with three of the twelve being African American females. The one thing that all students except the youngest had in common was a hiatus in their undergraduate studies. The students for this particular cohort were recruited by someone in the Enrollment Office of National-Louis University, and I had no idea who the students were prior to my first meeting with them.

In addition to the students in this cohort group, their instructors for three classes in the first two terms of the program provided valuable information to this study. The pool for selection of instructors came from the list of approved adjunct and full-time instructors in the Applied Behavioral Science department. The selection of instructors for this particular cohort was based primarily on experience teaching the specific courses used in this study and at least two years teaching in the Applied Behavioral Science program. The three instructors who were selected for this
study met the teaching experience criteria and included one Caucasian female in her mid-twenties, one African American female in her forties, and one Caucasian male in his forties. In addition, all of the instructors consented to participate in this study which was an essential component.

As a participant/observer in this study, I also played a part in this research endeavor and taught two courses in the first two terms as well. In my role as faculty coordinator of various cohort groups, it was my responsibility to select instructors to teach different courses in the sequence. In addition, it was strongly suggested that I meet each new cohort during the first introductory night and teach one course in each of the terms. With that in mind, I chose to teach the two courses that would alternate between those taught by the other instructors in this study. By teaching the second and fourth courses in the sequence, I was able to experience this group from a teacher’s perspective as well as observe the interactions that occurred between and among various group members.

The Context

The Applied Behavioral Sciences (ABS) degree completion program at National-Louis University (NLU) was chosen as the context for this study because of its focus on adult learners in a nontraditional program of study. The ABS program at NLU was established in 1978 to provide a means
for returning adult students to complete their undergraduate studies by obtaining a Bachelor of Arts in Applied Behavioral Sciences. In order to fulfill the requirements of this degree, students are accepted into this program with a minimum of ninety quarter hours of undergraduate credit and are required to take forty-eight quarter hours of a core curriculum offered in an accelerated format of twelve consecutive class modules. Each intensive course or module is approximately four to five weeks in length and is designed to incorporate classroom activities with equal amounts of independent study. The completion of this sequence of courses takes a little over one year and constitutes the Applied Behavioral Sciences major. Prior learning assessment options are available for students to earn additional credit to fulfill degree requirements.

The delivery of this program is designed to specifically meet the needs of the working adult. In order to accommodate the working adult, clusters or cohorts of students in the same general geographic area are formed by the Enrollment Department and begin the program at any time throughout the year not just at the beginning of the traditional semester or quarter. These cohorts of students remain together for the duration of the sequence of courses and meet one night a week for four hours in a location convenient to them. In the Chicago area, these locations have included NLU's four permanent academic centers as well
as leased space in schools, hotels or libraries. Because of its non-traditional nature, students in this program rarely set foot on a traditional campus since the teachers, the textbooks, and even registration are brought to the students at their location. Or as Harriet, one of the students, stated, "This is a very unusual scenario, where you stand still and the school moves around you." To facilitate this nontraditional approach, a full-time faculty member serves as an academic coordinator for each cohort. It is the responsibility of the academic coordinator not only to teach specific modules in the program, but to assist and advise the students, and to select and work with the instructors for the various modules so that the program becomes a coordinated whole.

According to the Bachelor of Arts Program in Applied Behavioral Sciences: Student Handbook (1993), the major focus of this program "is the study of human behavior as it relates to personal and professional development" (p. 2). This is accomplished through modules which focus on key ideas and theories from a variety of disciplines that can be applied to the study of individual and group behavior. In addition to specifically studying human behavior, the program goals "are to improve and further develop communication skills, critical thinking, and competencies for lifelong learning" (Bachelor of Arts Program in ABS: Student Handbook, 1993, p. 2). Influenced by Malcolm
Knowles’ (1984) theories of adult learning, each module is
designed to utilize a student’s experience base and to
provide not only theoretical constructs but practical
application. In order to maximize the time spent in the
classroom and to provide students with information and
classroom experiences not available in written form,
instructional guides have been developed for each module
with suggestions for conducting each session.

Because the courses or modules in this program are
offered in sequence and are each taught by different
instructors, this provided an opportunity to explore the
experiences the students in one cohort had with three
different instructors. The first, third and fifth courses
in the twelve course program sequence were involved in this
study (See Appendix A). The primary reason for collecting
data in this first half of the program sequence was to
observe the meaning students attached to their learning as
it developed during their initial exposure to a non-
traditional approach, and thus to limit the kinds of
influences that might occur later in the program. The three
courses, in order, were as follows: Dynamics of Group
Behavior, Effective Interpersonal Relationships, and
Multicultural Dimensions. Since these three courses are
generally related to effective communication with self and
others, it was expected that the students and teachers would
construct similar meanings of their experiences. To aid in
the collection of data and to provide valuable insights into both teachers and students, I chose to teach the second and fourth courses in the sequence.

Data Collection Process

The research method that was employed in the data collection phase of this study was a case study approach in the naturalistic, ethnographic mode. Since this research was attempting to understand the levels of meaning behind the educational experience, it was important to choose a method that would illuminate this understanding. As Spindler (1982) pointed out in Doing the Ethnography of School: Educational Anthropology in Action, this ethnographic approach to research pays "attention to covert, implicit, tacit, or 'hidden' cultural patterns that affect behavior and communication, particularly in face-to-face social interaction, but that are largely outside the consciousness of the actor" (p. 98). The use of this type of approach was also important in that

the ethnographic approach in general can be seen to be a continuing insistence that an understanding of social and cultural wholes is crucial for an understanding of what is taking place within the few hundred square feet that make up a classroom. The part cannot successfully be separated from the whole without violating fundamental aspects of its nature. (Wilcox, 1982, p. 304)

In further support of this research approach, the new brain research (Sylwester, 1993/94) suggested that emotion plays a much greater role in thinking processes than
previously thought which would indicate that understanding the meaning behind human thinking and experience could be important to the future of education. Polkinghorne (1988) in his explanation of the importance of narrative to understanding human behavior and meaning, argued that "experience is meaningful and human behavior is generated from and informed by this meaningfulness. Thus, the study of human behavior needs to include an exploration of the meaning systems that form human experience" (p. 1). He further asserted that narrative accounts are "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1). Because of the need to understand the deeper, hidden meaning in the teaching/learning experience from a holistic view, the use of the ethnographic or naturalistic approach provided the best way to conduct this research study.

As Cazden (1986), in her review of research on classroom discourse, pointed out "a combination of methods may be the best strategy" (p. 456). With this in mind, I devised a variety of data collection pieces to be utilized in this study. In doing this, I attempted to utilize information that was already being provided as a part of the class, so that the students would not be unnecessarily burdened with extra work and would be more willing participants. The specific data sources that were utilized were as follows (See Appendix B):
1. Interviews of teachers and students during the course of study.

2. Reflection pieces from both teachers and students.

3. Assessment instruments taken by both teachers and students including: The Representational System Bias Test (Lewis and Pucelik, 1982), The Learning-Style Inventory (Kolb, 1981), The Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey and Bates, 1978), and Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas and Kilman, 1974).

4. University provided instructional evaluation forms from the students.

5. Student classroom assignments.

6. Observations and reflections from the researcher as a participant/observer.

The initial reason for collecting this variety of different data sources was to provide parallel sets of observations for corroboration and comparison. It was expected that the interviews would be of primary importance to this investigation, and the reflection pieces would be used to corroborate information obtained in the interviews. Assessment instruments, instructional evaluation forms, and classroom assignments would be of secondary importance and would provide additional background information on the students and teachers. It was also hoped that the instructional evaluation forms and classroom assignments would provide additional insights into the meaning that was constructed. My observations and reflections were seen as providing a global perspective and additional insights into all of the above data sources. As the study evolved, it became evident that the reflection pieces, the instructional
evaluation forms and the classroom assignments provided little if any additional information. Because of this change, the interviews became even more important with the assessment instruments providing background information and my observations providing an additional perspective.

Since this research was designed to allow for an additional perspective on the part of the researcher, I was an integral part of the study and acted as not only an observer and interviewer, but also served as an instructor. This occurred in the following manner. I met with the cohort group during an introductory night at the beginning of the program of study. After this first night, I met the cohort group as their instructor for the second course in the sequence which was the Adult Development and Learning Assessment course. As a participant/observer in this course which investigates adult learning, I was able to gather information not only on individual experiences with learning but on common learning experiences. It also provided an opportunity to collect information from the assessment instruments, since the Representational System Bias Test (Lewis and Pucelik, 1982), The Learning-Style Inventory (Kolb, 1981), The Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey and Bates, 1978) are all taken and analyzed as part of the second course. After the students had taken the third course in the sequence which was taught by one of the other instructors, I once again appeared as the instructor for the
fourth course in the sequence, Research Methods in the Behavioral Sciences. Teaching this fourth course in the sequence allowed for the observation of any changes over time in the group members or the ways in which each constructed understanding and meaning from the program and the group.

The specific sequence of events for the collection of the data was as follows:

1. **Selection of teachers and students.**

   The three instructors (A, B, and C) for the courses not taught by me were selected based on recommendations of other full-time faculty in the Applied Behavioral Sciences department. From this pool of recommendations, I contacted instructors to ascertain their availability and willingness to participate in this study.

   Students were selected based on those students who registered for the next cohort group to meet in the Evanston/Skokie area.

2. **Assessment instruments for instructors.**

   Once the instructors were selected, they were each given the Representational System Bias Test (Lewis and Pucelik, 1982), The Learning-Style Inventory (Kolb, 1981), The Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey and Bates, 1978), and Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas and Kilman, 1974). These provided background information and possible explanations and insights into the meaning that the instructors attached to the teaching/learning situation.

3. **Reflective journals by the instructors.**

   Each instructor was asked to keep a journal of the experiences with this particular cohort regarding reactions to the class as a whole, to individual students, and to the course and the teaching of the course with an emphasis on what all this meant to each of them.
4. **First interview with instructor A prior to meeting the class for the first time.**

In addition, each instructor was interviewed prior to teaching this particular cohort to see what general expectations he or she had about the group and teaching this particular course, and what previous experiences he or she had had teaching this same course to other students.

5. **Meeting with students on Information night.**

The Information night is designed to give an overview of the program and for the students to get to know each other. This night was also used to briefly explain the research and to illicit student expectations of themselves as students and of this program.

6. **Second interview with Instructor A after second night of class.**

This interview focused on the instructor’s reaction to this group and what it meant to teach them.

7. **Third interview with Instructor A after class is completed, and collection of reflection journal.**

This final interview was more reflective in nature and focused on the instructor’s overall reaction to the teaching experience as a whole, any changes that they observed in this group of students, and what it meant to be their instructor. Student journals, student evaluation forms, and student inventories or other student work were also collected at this time.

8. **Interview of students after class with Instructor A is completed.**

Students were interviewed on an individual basis by telephone to find out what this class meant to them.

9. **Teach Adult Development and Learning Assessment to students.**

During my teaching of this course, students were requested to share the results of various inventories they completed as part of this course, and to keep a reflective journal.
It was during this class that the students took the same inventories that were given to the instructors. Students were also asked as a part of this course what these inventories meant to them in regard to their personal life and their learning. Students also completed written assignments for this course that provided further background information on the students and their experiences with learning.

10. First interview with Instructor B prior to meeting class for first time.

As with instructor A, the same procedures were followed.

11. Second interview with Instructor B after second night of class.

As with instructor A, the same procedures were followed.

12. Third interview with Instructor B after class is completed.

As with instructor A, the same procedures were followed.

13. Interview students after class with Instructor B is completed.

As with the first course and instructor A, the same procedures were followed.


During my teaching of this course, further insights into the students and their reactions and experiences with previous classes were gained.

15. Proceed as before with Instructor C.
(See Appendix A for Time Line)

An attempt was made to keep both the interviews and journals as open-ended as possible with adaptations being made during the interview for each individual. As Wilcox (1982) pointed out,
because one is attempting to understand a system in its own terms, according to its own criteria of meaningfulness, one cannot predict in advance which aspects of the system will have significance or the kind of significance they will have. (p. 459).

However, the general question areas that were asked can be found in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

Because one assumes as an ethnographer that particular parts of the system can be understood only in the context of the working of the whole, one cannot predict in advance precisely where one should focus. It is crucial to begin the research without specifically predetermined categories of observation, questionnaires, precise hypotheses, and so on, (Wilcox, 1982, p. 459).

Because of the dynamic nature of the teaching/learning experience, a variety of different data sources were collected to comprehend the complexity of the whole. Although an effort was made to use different data sources to corroborate the information gathered, it became evident that the interviews, the inventories and my observations provided the richest information and data to analyze.

Unfortunately, the student journals and their reflection pieces were inconsistently supplied to me and as such became fairly unreliable sources of data. It became obvious after the first course on Dynamics of Group Behavior that the student journals that were submitted as a requirement of the course were not adequately providing information on student meaning. Because they were a course requirement, students were asked to analyze and focus on
specific aspects of the course content and as such did not provide information on the meaning or importance of this course content to the student. Also at the end of the first course, it was difficult to obtain reflection pieces from all of the students, even with my presence in the classroom and repeated requests for this information. Those that I did receive did not provide any additional insights into student meaning or were a duplication of information obtained in the interviews. After the third course in the sequence, a student shared with me that the general attitude in the class about the reflection pieces was that they had too many classroom assignments to contend with and did not see the importance of or value in doing the reflection pieces. It was at this point that I decided to disregard the journals and reflection pieces as a source of data and concentrate on the student interviews. Similarly, no instructor journals were used because they were also incomplete.

For the purposes of initial analysis, it did prove helpful to conceptualize the general components of the teaching/learning experience. The framework that I used to guide the data analysis for this study was based on a communication model. This particular model as conceptualized by Wiseman and Barker (1967) took into account not only what was being communicated, but focused on the implicit, connotative meanings that occurred in the
process. As adapted for the purposes of this research, the key components of this model were the teacher, the student, and the event. Aside from these general organizing categories, no specific categories were created for the analysis of the data prior to conducting this research, since an attempt to do so would appear to defeat the purpose of this investigation. Instead, significant themes and patterns were allowed to emerge from the information gathered. Or as Cazden (1986) explained "descriptions of human behavior involve both searching for repeated patterns -- often called 'rules' -- and acknowledging, even with admiration, the inevitable improvisation" (p. 457). The analysis of the data then focused first on the events that seemed important to teachers and students and second on the meaning or perception that each attached to those events. The importance of an event was determined by the student or the teacher identifying it as important, by the way in which it was described, (i.e., the emphasis that was added in tone of voice or verbal expression), and by the student mentioning it at all or mentioning it more than once. The question of analyzing "meaning" requires a bit more elaboration.

**Analyzing Meaning**

According to Wiseman and Barker (1967) "if you are to discover the reality from which each individual operates then you must discover what reality is to him (p. 43)."
Stanage (1987) also concurs with this idea and further states that "speaking is the constituting and reconstituting process of encountering that is the personal reality of each one of us" (p. 54). Or as Mezirow (1991) explained, meaning exists within ourselves rather than in external forms such as books and that the personal meanings that we attribute to our experience are acquired and validated through human interaction and communications. Our actions toward things are based on the meanings that the things have for us. These meanings are handled in and modified through an interpretive process that we use in dealing with the things we encounter. As far as any particular individual is concerned, the nature of a thing or event consists of the meaning that that individual gives to it. This does not negate the existence of a world external to us but only asserts that what we make of that world is entirely a function of our past personal experiences. (p. xiv)

This idea of first looking at what was important to students and teachers stemmed from the idea that people perceive or attend to those things that have meaning or significance to them at some level. By analyzing the events (verbal and non-verbal messages, physical and mental actions, feelings, thoughts, etc.) that were important to teachers and students, a direction for exploring in-depth the significance of those events became evident which led to the next level of analysis.

The deeper, more implicit level of analysis which focused on the meaning that significant events had for students and teachers took into account the multiplicity of factors that influence that meaning. Since the meaning of an experience or event is not in the objective reality of
the event but in the individual, it was important to keep in mind that each individual was unique, was in relationship to something or someone, and was dynamic and ever changing. With this perspective on meaning in mind, I began the process of analysis.

**The Use of Data**

Although interviews, reflection pieces, observations, assessment instruments and student papers were gathered as data for this investigation, the interviews served as the primary source of information. The other data collected were found to be less useful. For example, not every student turned in a reflection piece for each class, and many who did felt that they had given much more information in the interview than what they had committed to paper. Student journals and papers were also not a good source of information since not all instructors required them and for those who did, the assignments asked students to respond to instructor-selected content areas, not those chosen by the student. Also, my observations proved to be a source for a general understanding of each student and their meaning perspective, as well as the student's view of the program as a whole. However, these observations were not useful in providing information on the specific courses under study, since the observations were made on classes that were not part of the interview process. All of these additional
pieces of information were used to further illuminate the information garnered from the student interviews.

In a final refinement of the original research plan, instead of examining all five courses that these students took during the period of time under study, only the three courses taught by instructors other than myself were actually examined. This was due to my own feeling of being too close to the students during my instruction time and not being able to focus on the teaching of the class without being distracted by trying to observe the class. I also sensed that the students would not be able to accurately or candidly express their views about me as a teacher or for that matter on what the course meant to them without saying what they thought I wanted to hear. However, teaching them was valuable in that I was able to get to know the students better, and from this knowledge I gained insights into the students' thinking processes and personality styles, the context in which they were learning, their reactions to others, and how the group functioned as a class.

Analyzing the Interviews

Because the interviews of both the teachers and students were of primary importance to this investigation, the process for analyzing those interviews was as follows. As mentioned earlier the interview questions for this research were open-ended in nature and only the general categories of teacher, student and event were initially
considered. Once the interviews got under way, refinements and clarifications became necessary to get at meaning, and certain specific categories began to emerge. For the students, the categories that emerged were: the content of the course, the individual reaction to the course as a whole, the reaction to the group, the reaction to the teacher, the reaction to the context, their perspectives on learning and their perception of any changes that occurred in either the individual and/or the group. For the instructors, the general categories that emerged were: their perception of their role as teacher, their perception of the students, and their perception of the learning or change that took place.

Each of the interviews was tape-recorded and transcribed, and from the transcriptions, I began the process of determining which of the student and teacher comments fit under which categories. For the students, this was accomplished by first looking at each individual student’s comments and color coding the comments as to the categories identified above. To manage all the data that resulted from this, a grid for each course was created with each student’s name on one side and the various categories across the top. A synthesis of the student comments was then logged on to the grid in the appropriate place. From this grid, it was then easier to see commonalities and differences between students regarding the categories. This
method of analysis was followed for each of the three courses.

For the teachers a slightly different method was used. The teacher comments were also color coded as to the categories they fell into. However, instead of a grid, a copy of the comments was made and the comments were cut into sections and placed into file folders according to category. From this a synthesis of comments was made about the meaning perspectives that the teachers held.

Once these categories had been analyzed for each teacher and the group of students, the final level of analysis involved examining the whole experience to see if there was a global or composite meaning that was derived. For each of the three courses, an analysis was also made to see if there were any similarities or differences in meaning between the students and the teacher. Finally, the meanings derived from all three courses were examined to get a composite picture of what this whole experience meant to these teachers and students.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS/CLASSROOM MEANINGS

The intent of this research endeavor was to understand the meaning that students and teachers construct from their teaching/learning experiences. It was revealed from the data collected that different aspects of the classroom experience contributed to the meaning that was derived, and had varying degrees of importance throughout the three courses that were under investigation. The seven different areas of meaning that emerged were: the course content or subject matter, the group relationships, individual or personal issues, the teacher, the learning context, the perceived learning, and change.

Since each individual course had a different instructor and had the potential for new and different meanings to be constructed, the results will first be considered on a course by course basis, looking first at student meanings and perceptions, then at the teacher's meanings and perceptions and finally at where those meanings and perceptions come together and where they diverge. Student
and teacher comments will be identified throughout by pseudonyms. The three courses to be examined are: Dynamics of Group Behavior, Effective Interpersonal Relationships, and Multicultural Dimensions. They will be presented in that order because they were experienced by the students in that chronological order. Looking at these courses as an aggregate will serve to summarize the meanings and perceptions that students and teachers constructed of their teaching/learning experiences.

Specific Within Course Perceptions/Meanings

Dynamics of Group Behavior Course

The Dynamics of Group Behavior course was the first course that students in this accelerated degree completion program experienced. The rationale established by the program developers for placing this course at the beginning of this sequential program was that it seemed essential for students to understand how groups function in order for them to 1) come together and function as a group, and 2) gain a better understanding of this non-traditional approach to learning. The specific objectives of the course can be found in Appendix C.

Student Perceptions/Meanings

In understanding what meaning students were deriving from this particular course, it became evident that those things that the student mentioned in the interview at the conclusion of the course were a good indication of those
things that had meaning for the student. Variations in the
importance of the different aspects of the learning
experience ranged from a very objective, listing of events
to a more personal, reflective interaction with their
experiences. In general, the areas that the majority of the
students commented on were as follows: content or subject
matter, group relationships, individual/personal issues,
teacher, learning context, perceived learning, and change.

Content or Subject Matter. Since content or subject
matter is generally considered a key component of
teaching/learning experiences, it will be considered first
to see which theories, concepts and educational objectives
had the most meaning for the students in this course. It is
interesting to note that when asked specifically about
content, the students interpreted content to mean the
subject matter or material covered in the course. With this
understanding in mind, the students remembered and listed
various topics that were covered in the course. The two
topics mentioned the most were: how a group functions and
conflict management. Additional areas that were mentioned
included: team building, the importance of listening, the
role of the facilitator, brainstorming and decision-making.
Although the majority of the students mentioned these areas,
it was obvious from their reaction to other aspects of their
learning experience that these were only a listing of topics
and not concepts that had been incorporated into a more
complex meaning structure. To illustrate this, Cindy, one of the students, commented that she would just "kind of absorb it and let it go and not worry about it any more. I think by the last class I had finally figured out what I was supposed to be getting out of the whole class."

From the list of topics mentioned, two seemed to carry special significance for certain students. These were conflict management and team building. In regard to conflict management, this was a topic that was mentioned the most by a majority of the students. This concept had a lot of meaning for people in the group not only as they dealt with other group members, but based on their past experiences with other people.

Team building as a concept was introduced in this course as a positive way of getting the group to work together, but in this particular case, students remembered team building because it was a negative class experience with a great deal of misunderstanding between class members. Richard, the class member who reacted most negatively to this experience, described it in the following way,

We started to do "How You Build a Team." And being that I worked for this company for a whole bunch of years, and we're going through a reorganization, not reorganization, but downsizing and re-engineering. And what's come here [in class] is that they come up with the concept of as a team. And to be honest with you, it pushed my buttons, and I spoke about this idea of team and how I don't see it's any good and all of that. Well, .... What came out of this is that we were all drained afterwards. So, the team building thing didn't really go as smoothly or as well as I think it could have. And the only thing out of that is that I went to
class the ...next week, and I apologized for us not maybe getting what team building was. When I heard that we were a team, I went off on my thing - what it means for me - and I was very negative. So, for myself I didn’t really learn what it would take or what you need to do to build a team.

From another student’s perspective, Amy explained,

We were talking about team building, and Richard went on to tell us not about team building, but about downsizing at his company. And then it went on to downsizing and losing jobs, and we never really got back to team building because it was towards the end of the class. And Diane, who’s real name isn’t Diane but she goes by the name Diane, who’s really another character in the class, couldn’t get the concept of team building, so she got mad at Richard. Okay? So, she told Richard that he monopolized the time talking about downsizing when she didn’t understand what team building was.

Team building was definitely something that these students reacted to negatively.

In looking more at what the content or subject matter meant to them, the students considered the content of this course or the material covered as something that they already knew. They felt that they were now learning labels and new words to describe behaviors that they had already experienced. For example, Harriet pointed out that

I also learned that some of the things that I was doing had names. I didn’t know that forming, norming, storming and performing. [I was] doing it and not knowing that it was researched. Oh, I did that. I just didn’t know that was what you called it.

In general, the students perceived the subject matter as covering no new material or concepts, but as reinforcing their prior learning. For Harriet, it reinforced the fact that she was and had been taking the correct actions in
other groups where she was a participant. As she commented, "I learned more of what I have been doing right."

Possibly because of this, some of the students found the course to be too easy, or found it to be boring and not interesting. However, some found it frustrating and many had difficulty understanding one of the textbooks which was highly theoretical. As Cindy summed it up,

I haven’t been in school for a very long time.... I do a lot of reading, but I haven’t made myself read things except for pleasurable reading. So it was different to have to sit down and seriously read things and the first two books I thought were just as dull as anything, and it was very difficult to read. They were not interesting and didn’t stay with me.

At least half of the students recognized that many of the concepts that were covered in this course were things that carried over to either their work or their daily life or to the classroom group. When asked if what she was learning in class carried over to work, Cindy explained that, "Yes, I’m making it. It needs to carry over into work, and I’m going to make it carry over into work, if that makes any sense." Amy also liked the theories. I like the way that not only did I read them and write about them but I started to use them. It was something. You see, I could be using them, but not knowing that I was using someone’s theory or knowing that it worked or knowing that it didn’t work.

As it applied to the class itself, some of the students were intrigued by the psychological aspects of individual and group reactions and saw the content of this course as a way of establishing a common ground with the group or having,
according to Cindy, "a common ground to meet on." A few of the students felt that they were absorbing the material without meaning and that they were probably learning more than they thought at the time. This is actually a rather profound realization that meaning would come or deeper meaning would be attached to these concepts as the information was being assimilated.

In general, the content or subject matter of this particular course did not have a great deal of meaning to the students. Those concepts that did have meaning to the students were those that could be readily applied or posed the most difficulty in their lives outside of class. For many the lack of meaning in this course was due to having previously had a lot of experience with groups and their dynamics.

Group Relationships. Group relationships was an area where students expressed their reaction to individual group members and to the group as a whole. The focus of most of the comments in this area was how each individual student perceived the group and how the group reacted to the individual student and to others in the group. This seemed to be an area of importance to the students.

The comments most often made regarding the group focused on descriptive characteristics of the group. These characteristics fell into two major categories. One related to observable physical qualities, and the other related to
positive and negative personal aspects of the group. For example, the most frequently mentioned observable physical characteristic of the group was that it was a diverse group where everyone was unique and different from each other.

Harriet recognized this, when she said,

> You can definitely see the personalities as you sit around the table of who is more of an aggressive student, and who’s more laid back, who doesn’t speak out, who speaks out too much, who brings personal problems to the table, who doesn’t know what’s going on at all. It’s a very diverse group of people; backgrounds, ages, employment, everything.

Cindy saw this too,

> I think as a whole... we’re such an interesting, diverse group.... There are older women that are retired and this is an enrichment. And, there’s people that kind of always loudly banged their own drum. And, you know, it’s just so many different people there.

In addition to comments on general differences, a few students pointed out that there was a gender imbalance with more females than males and that there were a number of older members in the group. Evelyn, the oldest member of the group, had an interesting perspective on this,

> I felt that there were people of various ages in the group, and somebody had to be the oldest one. And I guess I am it, although Harriet is almost up there with me. But I’ve worked with people of all ages all my life. I don’t feel uncomfortable about it. I haven’t accepted my age yet anyway.

One fourth of the group was in their late 50’s to late 60’s, and there was only one male student. Since this group did have a wide variety of racial, ethnic, age and gender differences, these observations on the differences in the group were not particularly profound.
The personal characteristics of the group that were mentioned fell into positive and negative aspects of the group. The positive characteristics that were mentioned included that the group was interesting, talkative, accepting, caring, creative, respectful, comfortable, nice and enthusiastic. Phyllis, who had originally started the program with another group, provided some valuable insights into this group,

This group to me..it's not as tense. The other group to me seemed more tense..maybe I felt tense. It just seemed too rigid for me. Maybe because there's a lot of people who are artsy in this group, and they're very creative people, and they seem very...they don't seem narrow minded. Not that the other people did. [This group is] more open ..receptive to different things. So, I like this group. I really do, but it's a nice mix of everything.

On the negative side, there were some students who felt that the group was unfriendly, difficult to get to know, and competitive. Virginia was one of those students. She felt that,

We had people who would talk on top of people and there was a lot of competitiveness. I understand why because I felt that way too. You're supposed to act in class, and you've got your grades in there and....So we, had a lot of competitiveness and rudeness in my estimation. But then in the third week we seemed to talk about it and kind of straighten it out. People have at least in my estimation listened to each other.

A few students also pointed out that they were uncomfortable with people discussing their personal problems in class, and they felt that this was a group of adults who were acting like kids. As Richard pointed out, "Many times everything got, you know, maybe a little out of hand, with side
conversations and stuff like that, and nobody within our
group would stop it." So the students were recognizing a
variety of characteristics about this group.

Aside from describing the group characteristics, a few
members of the group were able to reflect upon what was
happening in the group. Their reflections ranged from what
the group meant to them to specific insights into both
individual members and the group as a whole. When
considering what the group meant to them, it was interesting
to see that these students valued and were learning a lot
from others in the group. Phyllis felt that,

They all have something that I feel like I can learn or
take with me. Really everyone. Every single one of
them. I don’t know if they feel like that about
everybody else, but for me, I’m looking at it as an
opportunity to learn from each one of them because
every single one of them is different. To learn and
take something from them.

Some students were also trying to figure out the group and
their role in it. They questioned what the group’s reaction
to them was.

In looking at the specific insights they had into
different members of the group and how the group was
functioning as a whole, Mary Ann described some of her own
and the group’s reaction to various students in the class.

We all feel sorry for her because she doesn’t say
anything. She’s very shy and quiet and I don’t know
how we’re going to bring her out. But I thought that
was nice that there were two women there who really
want to bring her out, and I think that was very..that
I can identify with. There’s another woman who’s very
difficult for me and I avoid her. But I guess that’s
what you have to do. That’s probably a good learning
experience, that we are all different and all have to learn to get along with the differences.

For the group as a whole, a few students identified some of the negative unspoken group issues of gender and race that seemed to be underlying a lot of the group’s interactions. But they also saw the group growing and learning and coming together as a group. Again Mary Ann summed this up when she said, "I can see the group growing and I can see us coming together a little bit more and loosening up."

In general, the individual reaction to the group was positive. Everyone in the group had a general liking for the rest of the group. There were no overt animosities, and everyone saw the group as friendly, caring, and respectful, and as a group that they liked interacting with even though they were all quite different from each other.

Individual/Personal Issues. For the most part this area dealt with what this course meant to the students on a personal level. It also revealed some of what the students were experiencing in their own lives while they were attending this class. But most importantly, the students revealed a lot about themselves and how they perceived themselves in this educational endeavor.

Most of the student comments in this area related to their reasons for going back to school and for being in this program. In explaining their reasons for being in the program, other issues surfaced as well. The two main reasons for being in this program were the desire for a
career change, and the desire to get a bachelor’s degree. Most students saw this program as a way to prepare themselves for a career that they had always desired, but were currently not pursuing. As Cindy stated "I am really anxious to make a career change and the only way that I can do it is to get some more education."

Aside from providing the requisite degree for changing careers, the desire to get a bachelor’s degree was also seen as an accomplishment and the completion of unfinished business since many of these students were returning to school after a hiatus. To Evelyn and Virginia, two of the oldest students, getting a degree was particularly meaningful. Evelyn’s story was,

First of all, I’ve done a lot of work and I’ve realized when I decided to go back to school, nobody really considered me as not having degrees. It was really a commitment for me to say, "Okay, I haven’t finished my college work." It surprised me that nobody realized that, but it was really a matter of coming face to face with incomplete work. When my husband died, I looked at myself eventually, and though I was kind of lost, and I thought, "Well, what do I wish I had finished?" And this was the big answer. And I was sorry, I had six and a half years of college but no degree.

Virginia’s story was similar, and as she described,

When I was divorced, I had an opportunity to rise very quickly in different positions. First, I did go back to school for two years and became an interior designer so I had one small degree there. And then I got into alcoholism [counseling]. I rose very quickly in that because that was like twenty years ago. It just seemed that I started as a counselor, and then I went to head counselor and then I was program coordinator. Always at the back of my head and everybody else’s was, "Do you have a degree?" Well, I didn’t, but I was working on this. That sort of held me back personally and businesswise, because I was dealing with people who had
Master's degrees. I think, by the grace of God, I was able to hold my own out there without the degree. So, it's always been there, you know. It's probably more important to me than most people because of the lost opportunity when I was young. So, I have this vision that my children see me in a cap and gown and getting my degree next year.

A few of the students expressed a slightly different perspective on why they were in the program by commenting that they were bored and had to do something. They were also hoping that not only would they meet interesting people in the program but that they would make themselves more interesting in the process. Amy enumerated her reasons for returning to school,

I guess I have to finish what I start. Number one, it's basically accepted to go back to school at any age. Number two, you can only play tennis and shop for so many years. Number three, you do meet interesting and different people in different classes.

Comments on family or personal problems also arose that were unrelated to what was happening in class.

Aside from the basic desire to obtain a degree, some students expressed a strong desire to grow and learn. They recognized that learning in general could make a profound difference in their lives, and they enjoyed learning. Mary Ann commented, "I've enjoyed being a student the past three years since I've returned to school, I have actually enjoyed the learning process." Richard said,

This is not my first time back in school, and what I've liked about being in school is the opportunity to grow. It's made a profound difference in my life, you know, going back. I was never a good student, so going back, I'm able to show myself that I'm quite capable of doing the work. If I really care about the subject, I'm
quite capable of doing whatever it takes to get it done.

Evelyn also felt glad "to be with people who are growing and learning, and that's what I'm most anxious to do." More specifically, they had a strong desire to learn about themselves and others. Amy summed this up best by saying,

It's a nice opportunity to see what's going on outside this little world. Some of the people in our class are just so different from one another that after, I guess, our five meetings I figured most of them out. It's very interesting not only going to class but listening to the interaction and hearing these people communicate with one another. I mean some of them are scared of their own shadows, and some are just unbelievable into themselves. I'm just learning so much from the people in my different classes that I've taken over the last 25 years that forget about the books and forget about the instruction and forget about the lectures. Just the interaction between these people, it's amazing what you can learn from just watching them.

Through this particular class the students seemed to be gaining insights into their own personality and recognizing that their perceptions of others were accurate. They also saw the importance of belonging to the group, and that developing relationships with other students would be helpful to their own learning.

In general, the students derived a great deal of personal meaning from participation in this program. Getting an education and learning were important personally to this group of students. However, about half of the group seemed to be pursuing this degree completion program thinking that it would almost guarantee them a new, more lucrative job. The other half of the class found just the
experience of personally learning and growing as the most valuable part of education. At various times throughout the program this issue became a topic of discussion with those who were in the program for the pure joy of learning trying to convince the others who just wanted a degree that there was something more to be gained from learning than just a piece of paper.

Teacher. Since a teacher can have an impact on student learning, it was interesting to note the comments that students had regarding the teacher. Once again the majority of the comments students made about the teacher were focusing mainly on descriptive characteristics. However, a few of the students were able to reflect on what having a teacher like this one meant to them.

Most of the student comments about the teacher dealt with a description of various qualities that the students perceived in the teacher. The comments focused on either personal characteristics or the students' reaction to her professional qualities. The primary characteristics that the majority of the students identified was that the teacher was a facilitator. Amy put it nicely,

She was a facilitator. That's what she was. She was definitely that. She was neutral. Just, you know, she didn't express her opinion or nothing. We would go. She kept us. She would let us talk, and she'd watch and whatever. She was a good facilitator. I learned from watching her and the way she conducted the group.
However, some of the students were bothered by this lack of structure. Mary Ann, in particular, was uncomfortable with this style of teaching.

Frankly, what I guess I was expecting was more instruction, more from Kate, which in our second class we learned she's a facilitator. She's not supposed to stand there and lecture and I do like the input of an instructor, so that is going to take some getting used to. I don't think that we're learning that much from each other.

This perception of the teacher as a facilitator may have resulted from the students learning what a facilitator was as part of the course, or they noticed this quality because it was a key component of a non-traditional approach to learning. Additional comments about the teacher's teaching ability included that she was organized and prepared and did a good job. Students perceived her as a guide who was fair, and knowledgeable. They also felt that she used relevant examples, made appropriate comments on their papers, and handled the class well.

Personal characteristics seemed to be important to these students as well. They found the teacher to be pleasant, nice, upbeat, accepting, warm, low key and calm. Some felt that she was a wonderful teacher who was approachable and someone they could talk to. Evelyn felt that "she's a very warm, open person and a very feeling persona, and I could relate to her very quickly." Richard found her cute and attractive, and explained,
I mean she was pleasant to look at. Okay, from a male standpoint, that I don’t have to explain. But I think what went along with that was that she was very vital. She was very upbeat. She was never really down. She was never negative. So, that’s an attraction right there.

In general, the students enjoyed and liked Kate. Harriet even pointed out that the teacher seemed to like the group as well, when she said,

I thought she was charming. She loved our group. At least, she said that she did, and I believed it. She was very down to earth. She was laid back. She really let us have the lead. She didn’t pull the reins in tight a lot.

A few students reflected on some of the deeper issues that occurred regarding the teacher. For example, some of the students gained a deeper understanding of the teacher/facilitator role. As Diane explained,

She is very good. The more, actually, the more I’ve been reading the yellow book about the facilitator’s role, the more I’ve been re-evaluating the way she was doing it. Because, I mean, at that time I wasn’t watching the way she was facilitating. But she’s actually more of a facilitator than a teacher. She needs us to kind of do the group process in itself, but yet lead us at the same time. So it’s a very hard, actually, a hard role for her I would think. But she, she handled it very, she’s very wonderful.

As Phyllis pointed out earlier, this teacher was a wonderful role model for being a facilitator.

A few students also saw behind the role of the teacher and recognized that the teacher was a human being who could be upset by conflict that occurred in class and who could be emotionally involved in the teaching/learning experience.
Evelyn referred to the incident with the team building exercise to explain this. Evelyn’s explanation was,

The room was quiet and somber as we closed and this seemed to upset Kate, who felt she was an upbeat person, and I feel what happened was rather important so I wrote this paper and told her that I felt that it was great that they could feel comfortable enough to air their anxieties. She felt that, and she answered me, and she said "I appreciate the analysis and I think since some of the class members looked at furthering their education in a positive way, when the class shifted, these individuals appeared disappointed." ...I think she’ll learn, and I think that these things are going to happen again and she’ll learn from them. But she couldn’t guide the group into being upbeat and talking about pizza when they were talking about losing their jobs, you know. So that was my reaction.

So by Kate confronting different situations in class, some of the students felt that she and the group would be learning from these experiences. In general, the students did not have a great deal to say about the teacher, other than she was a facilitator, they liked her as a person, and that she seemed to enjoy teaching them.

Context. In looking at the meaning that students construct of a learning situation, it was possible that the context in which they learn had an impact on their learning. For this reason, students were asked for their reaction to non-traditional learning to see what if any meaning this held for the students.

Non-traditional learning in an accelerated format was new to most of the students in this group. Because this was a new experience, comments made by the students revealed
that some of the group liked this approach and some did not. In all, six students liked non-traditional learning and four did not which left two students who liked learning this way but found it frustrating. Harriet expressed this sentiment by saying,

I'm less frustrated with it now than I was at the beginning... At the beginning even though my schooling was a long time ago, I still remember a very structured environment, and when you were learning something, you were learning it, and you weren't... I guess you learned more with blinders on and totally focused. So that in this interaction kind of learning, when somebody does go off on a tangent, it frustrated me the first few times it happened. But now I'm a little more pliable and able to sit there without fidgeting, because that tangent is worthwhile too. Even though it doesn't particularly pertain to the subject matter, it still may be important enough to pick something up from.

The positive aspects that students found meaningful were the personable, interactive format which was less structured and involved more small group interaction; and the experientially based learning that made the readings in the book come alive. As Evelyn commented, "the experiential things were very vivid." In addition to liking this more interactive approach, a few students liked the fact that there were no tests and no math in the program, but there was a lot of writing. Mary Ann, in particular, found this emphasis on writing and lack of math to be a strong reason for choosing this program. As she pointed out,

Quite frankly, the reason I chose to do this non-traditional program was really because of the math requirement in the other schools, which would have entailed three semesters. It would have been three semesters just to work up to the course that I needed for a quarter and this looked very good and very
interesting because of the writing aspect. I do like to write, and I thought it would be a great learning experience.

Some students also liked the convenience of learning this way or as Harriet put it, "you stand still and the school moves around you."

The negative comments about this approach to learning stemmed mainly from the students wanting the context to be more traditional with less student input and more teacher lecture. Richard summed this up by saying,

I don’t think I expected, I guess, I didn’t really expect that as a class we were going to be doing what we have done so far, like actually having control of the whole. A lot of control within the group and have things go...you didn’t actually have stuff that you had to copy down from the blackboard and the teacher telling you everything. I don’t think I expected that. I mean, I think, I expected more instruction from the pulpit, more instruction from the instructor, that we would have to be listening more if nothing else, and there wasn’t as much of that in the group. I guess that was a little bit of a surprise to me. And it was explained. Kate did explain why. So, then I understood it, but I guess I...that’s a little bit of a transition there, and I didn’t really expect that.

Aside from liking or disliking this non-traditional approach, some students found that this was a more challenging way of learning and definitely found this to be a wonderful growing experience for them. Diane emphasized that "this is accelerated..it’s very challenging," and Cindy added that "it’s forcing me to think of things, to do things instead of waiting for somebody else to give it, to tell me how to do things." They also appreciated the fact that this type of learning allowed for different ways of learning and
were surprised that so much learning was occurring because it was fun. Overall, the students were finding this non-traditional program to be a positive experience.

**Learning.** In considering what they had learned in this course, the students comments fell into four general categories. They learned about learning, about themselves, about others, and about applying their learning to life. This area provided much more reflection on the part of the students.

Learning about learning brought comments about different aspects of learning, such as the activities involved in learning, and the approach to learning and the importance of the group process to learning. An appreciation for the class activities was mentioned, and students thought these activities were vivid and really brought to life the theories about group dynamics. A few students also expressed an appreciation for the fact that this type of learning focused more on feelings and gave students an opportunity to go in different directions and pursue their own learning. Phyllis focused on the feeling aspect of this learning and the value of the group when she said,

that was one of the things, and then we were talking about just more feeling type things...So the group is...there is a lot that they bring. Not just the creative, but the...not just creative thinkers, but there's a lot. There are people there who aren't so creative that have a lot to offer and give to the group.
Amy also recognized that she was learning every minute and not just during class time.

I did learn a lot. I mean I could walk outside and learn something from walking outside. I could learn traffic law. I can learn about concrete. It's not like you have to be in a class for that extra ten minutes and not take a break and let the air circulate because I'm going to miss something in there. I know better than that.

A new appreciation and understanding of group process as a means of learning was also mentioned. Communication and listening to different viewpoints were also important to this process.

Learning about themselves seemed to be a key component of what the students learned in this course. As Amy pointed out, "What am I learning? I guess I'm learning how to deal with the public. I guess I'm learning how to deal with my family. I guess I'm learning how to deal with my inner self." Many students mentioned individual changes in their learning, such as becoming more aware and learning to analyze, evaluate and use information better. For example, Diane noticed that she "evaluated conversations differently than I did. Actually I didn't used to evaluate them, but now I do." Learning these skills seemed to help build self-confidence as learners.

Learning about others in the class helped students increase their understanding of human behavior. Several students commented that they were learning how and why people react to communication, and were learning about
different personalities and how to deal with them. Amy queried,

So what am I learning from the class? I'm learning about people. I'm learning about why they do what they do, and that there is a certain time frame. There's elements. There's environment. I feel that some of the people are in the class because they're lonely. A lot of the people are in the class to raise their self-esteem. Half the class thinks that they're going to go on to bigger and better jobs.

The students also learned to listen to different viewpoints and came to the realization that other students were getting different things out of the same situation. There seemed to be a genuine appreciation for the other students, and a few students even recognized that they were learning a great deal from other students in class through their comments and diverse perspectives and by observing the group and applying some of the group dynamics theories they had learned. However, one student felt that learning so much about the personal experiences of other group members was a negative and something she didn't want to learn.

The most important thing that students learned throughout this course was that they could take the theories they had learned in the course and apply these theories to their lives. Amy realized the importance of this, but she didn't think the other students did. She commented that,

These people went into this curriculum thinking there's going to be a lecture. They're going to take notes. They're recording the classes, and there's going to be a test at the end of the week. They don't understand what they're reading and what they're writing. They have to absorb, put it together, and write it down. They're not asking you a matching question. They're
listing all these scientists and all the theories and match them, or what is this theory? How does it? That’s not what it’s for. They don’t care if you use this as a reference. They want you to use this as a reference. They want you to apply it to everyday life. People in the class, they don’t get it. They’re waiting for a lecture every day. There are four tape recorders or five going. Every time someone writes something on the board, these people write it down. Instead of, think about what’s on the board; how it relates to the people in the class, how it relates to the environment, how it relates to the culture that they live in, how it relates to the people that they know, how it relates to the group. They’re not getting it. They’re not thinking. They’re writing it down because they think they’re going to be tested on it, and they don’t understand how the program works. Even if it was explained to them, it has to be explained over because they think it’s a regular class situation. They don’t know it’s independent study and independent learning. I like it because I can work at my own speed when I want, how I want and if I have any questions I’ll ask them.

On the other hand, some students commented they were making connections between what they were learning and what was happening to them in their daily lives. Virginia pointed this out when she said,

I really have learned a great deal, and it’s sort of putting it into my own life. As a matter of fact, it’s inspired me to do something that I probably wouldn’t have done otherwise, that was to have a talk with my son which is set up for tomorrow, about some of my own needs and how I feel I’m growing....so I’m hoping to, you know, use some of what I’ve learned and put it in practice with my family.

This application of theories seemed to be occurring both within the classroom and at work or at home.

Change. Since learning presupposes that some change will occur, it was interesting to see if the students saw any change occurring, either in themselves or in other students in class. Dynamics of Group Behavior, as the first
class, did not lend itself to noting much change in the group as a whole or in group members, because of the short time frame and because the students were still getting to know one another. However, some students did notice that they had changed even in a short four week period.

The individual changes that students noticed were actual changes in their behavior, an increase in awareness, and a deeper understanding. As Virginia commented previously, she was actually able to use some of the group discussion theory in her own life and therefore saw a change in her behavior as she tried out these new behaviors in her own life. Another student found that she had become more focused and goal oriented in her behavior as a result of this class. An increase in awareness was mentioned by a number of student who felt that they were now analyzing the world differently because they could take the theories and see how they applied in their lives. They also felt that they were more aware of human behavior and that they had gained a different perspective on some of the beliefs that they had held. This different perspective was echoed by a student who saw this course opening up new vistas and new understandings, while another student, Harriet, gained a deeper understanding of learning as encompassing all of one’s experiences and that tangents could be worthwhile.

Although the content of this course was on group dynamics, only Mary Ann commented on any changes that they
perceived in the group as a whole or in individual members. She observed that,

I can see the group growing, and I can see us coming together a little bit more and loosening up. Everybody seems very... I think everybody in this group, this would be my personal guess, is not really sure, except for Amy, is not really sure what's expected of them, and it's very uptight. It's nebulous. We don't know what we're getting into.

The focus for most of the students during this first class was on themselves as learners and on how they fit in with the other members of the class.

Summary. Of the six areas that were discussed above, the areas that received the most attention and had the most meaning for these students were those involving their own personal issues and those involving their reaction to the group and how they fit into the group. Individually some of the students could see that they were becoming more analytical and more aware of human behavior. They also saw that the group with all of its diversity was valuable to their learning. The two areas that seemed to be least important were the content or subject matter and the teacher. Although students felt that they had learned something and could apply what they learned to their own life situations, very little actual subject matter was mentioned. In regard to the teacher, the general reaction was positive, but beyond the observation that she was a good facilitator, most of the students had little to say about what she meant to their learning.
Teacher A Perceptions/Meanings

Description. The first instructor, Kate, that this group of students encountered was lively and vivacious. She was a white female, 26 years old, and was younger than all the students except one. Although her age did not appear to present a problem to the students, it was a concern for the instructor that her students might not take her seriously. She expressed this concern by saying that "sometimes my concept of age and how they're going to react to me is a pressure. It's like an expectation that maybe I have to try harder" (Interview #1). Aside from being youthful, Kate presented herself as a professional with a great deal of self-confidence. Being attractive in appearance and having an up-beat, friendly personality appeared to be assets when establishing herself as the instructor of this particular class.

Interestingly enough, Kate did not originally intend to pursue a career in teaching, but a successful first experience teaching a college class changed her mind. In fact, her first students liked her so much as a teacher that they gave her a plant and a note that said,

"We know that we've heard you talk about wanting to go into business and training and all that, but we just want you to know that we just hope you would keep teaching, because we thought that you did a great job, and that that's what we think you should be doing. And you need to know that."

From that point on Kate has been teaching at least part-time in a variety of settings which include business seminars,
training for the armed services, and adjunct professorships at NLU and various junior colleges.

Although Kate had only been teaching part-time and had had no formal teacher training, she had developed her own philosophy of education through occasional workshops and her own observations and reflections. This philosophy became evident in the interviews with her as she described her role as a teacher, her expectations for the students and the learning outcomes that she hoped to achieve. It is these three areas that are discussed below.

Perception of the Teacher. Since a teacher has an influence on what happens in the classroom and is there to assist in the learning that occurs, it was important to understand how that role was perceived by the teachers themselves. Kate revealed her perception of the teacher’s role by highlighting in general the characteristics and methods used by teachers and by explaining how she personally approached the task of teaching.

Kate had an interesting way of describing the general characteristics of a teacher by explaining what she used to think a teacher was.

I guess the concept is that I always thought that I was going to teach it. And I’m the expert, and they need to know that I’m the expert, and that I need to tell them that. This is my prior concept. And that they need to know that I know what is going on, and that I need to cite statistics and cite research, and that I need to talk about that, um, that I just need to refer to the books the whole time, and that I always had to do, I guess, an academic or background type summary whenever I
was talking and citing research. That was what I thought, my first image of teaching was. It was doing that and that they were supposed to learn from that. (Interview #1)

Kate no longer saw the role of a teacher as being an expert and the imparter of knowledge. Instead, over the years she had come to realize that it was appropriate for teachers to admit that they might be wrong or didn’t have the answer, and to allow the students themselves to find the answer and more actively participate in their own learning.

Another past perception she had of teaching was that teaching was fairly static. As she explained,

I also thought that once I came up with a plan on how to teach something that I could do it the same way every time. I know that doesn’t work, so I’ll try new things out, and I’ll learn. (Interview #1)

The idea of change and growth on the part of the teacher had become an important part of Kate’s new view of teaching. To Kate,

Growing is what an instructor is all about, in being able to change and not keep the same pattern all the time. Every group’s going to be different and with that I have to adapt to what is needed for that specific group. (Interview #3)

A teacher to Kate was someone who was human and was growing and learning along with the students.

A teacher’s ability to adapt was also something that Kate saw as influencing the methods a teacher would use in the classroom. She quickly learned from her own experience as a student and from her teaching of adult learners that the lecture method was not appropriate. As Kate explained,
I remember a lot of my professors. Their lecturing style just wasn’t quite working or something. It wasn’t terrible, but it wasn’t quite working for what the students, well,....what I needed....I have to think of my students. I would say it’s more of learning through experience. I’ve read some, and I’ve done some training, but I think about taking several approaches to it not just having one best way.

(Interview #1)

Using a variety of approaches and learning from experience were elements of the methods used by adult educators, and Kate had definitely embraced those methods as ones that work in teaching adults. In general, Kate saw the role of a teacher as being an approachable human being who was capable of adapting their methods and style of teaching to fit the different students that they encountered.

Not only did Kate have a general perception of the role of a teacher, but she also saw her own personal role as a teacher. In looking at Kate as a teacher, it was difficult to separate her methods of teaching from her characteristics as a teacher. Since so much of who she was as a person naturally flowed into her style of teaching and the techniques she used, it was almost impossible to find a clear dividing line between who she was as a teacher and how she went about her craft of teaching. The following is an attempt to look at how Kate saw herself in her role as a teacher and what methods she used to accomplish the task of teaching.

As a person, Kate came across as a positive, up-beat, energetic woman who was easy to talk to. As a teacher she
saw herself as being caring, sensitive, understanding, and sympathetic as well as kind and gentle. It was easy to see this in my conversations with her, and I had always felt an instant rapport with her. Although Kate used a number of adjectives to describe who she was as a teacher, the three major attributes that kept reoccurring were being up-beat or positive, being open, and being human or real.

Being up-beat was a driving force in Kate's life. As she pointed out, "I've always wanted to be up-beat. I guess, I've said that a bunch" (Interview #3). She saw learning as being fun and always made a point of greeting her classes with a smile. She even enjoyed the class playing a joke on her. In fact, a discussion in one of the class sessions that ended the class on a down note was particularly disturbing to her and was mentioned repeatedly in two of the interviews. As Kate explained,

When I used an example of team building in corporations, people were looking around and the tone of the class changed. There was more tension. I asked if they didn't like the example. I know some of them are not working in corporations. They didn't know what to say. They seemed unclear about what I was asking and didn't have any experience with it. The tone of the class was up-beat, but with the discussion of team building the tone went down. One student said the word negative, and she didn't like meetings to end on a negative note. Another student responded that life isn't always positive, and these are real issues. (Interview #2)

In addition to this confusion about the topic, one student described a negative team building experience he had had at work which exacerbated the situation. Kate's concern over
this incident and her desire to be up-beat were reflected in the following comment,

I always like to leave on an upbeat note, but that wasn’t…that evening the…not everyone left on an upbeat note, and a lot of people asked me after class what I thought about that. And I guess it’s just part of my wanting them to like the experience of learning, that I was hoping that they could still like it after that situation, although it was only a matter of maybe 20 or 30 minutes the discussion went on. (Interview #3)

This incident was so disturbing to Kate that she spent many hours trying to figure out how to deal with it in the next class session, and it became a powerful learning experience for her as well as the class.

Since Kate saw herself as growing and changing, being open to new ideas and to people seemed a natural adjunct to her idea of developing. As she explained, "I’ve always had open communication" (Interview #1). She also talked about leaving assignments open so students could add their own creativity.

Usually I know the comfort level pretty well, enough that they’ll tell me, and they will be open enough, and I’m open enough to accept being there to make changes. So I think that’s positive. (Interview #1)

According to Kate, this openness on her part and willingness to share who she was as a person also encouraged students to open up and share some of their experiences and who they were.

Not being artificially rigid or acting like an authoritarian, Kate could relate well to students by showing
them that she was human. She recognized that she was only human and not some teacher authority and that the students could learn from each other as well as from her. Because she was secure in who she was and valued being honest and real with her students, she was able to admit that she didn’t know the answer to everything, and thus made herself more accessible to students.

If I don’t have an answer for a question, I’ll usually say I’ll find that answer out or admit, honestly admit, that I don’t have the answer and not... and that’s OK that I don’t have the answer to that. And there may be something that I ask you that you don’t have the answer to also. But it’s probably an honesty type approach, just not the I’m the instructor, and I’m the all-knowing. (Interview #1)

Sharing experiences from her own life also added to her authenticity. Or as Kate described it,

I’ll say things from my own experience and that. And that they take that information, and they’re using that information, and they’re inquiring more, and so I like that. And I’ve gotten that on some of my feedback sheets before. So this time, in this class specifically that I was working with, I tried to really incorporate some of the experiences that I’ve been going through and their interpretations too. And that was real interesting, where I could map out what I was experiencing in my own groups and in my meetings that I was having and involved in. And they could really pull out a lot of different dynamics and a lot of different viewpoints from it. So it was a kind of working through situation and I liked that. (Interview #3)

Aside from wanting to present herself as a positive, open human being, Kate had a strong desire to want to succeed and do her best as a teacher. As she explained it, “I put more pressure on myself to, I guess, maybe make a
good class or try to do the best I can to make a good class. There’s a higher level of expectation for myself" (Interview #1).

Although teaching is only a part-time job for Kate, it was obvious that she put a lot of thought into her teaching and interactions with students. As she explained,

It also challenges my mind too, and I really like the experience of thinking, "OK. Remember what they said last week or last session, and how can I incorporate that, or how can I share with them some more or how can I restructure things." (Interview #1)

Kate also recognized that she had an awesome responsibility for getting students excited about learning and getting them to stay in school.

The relationship that Kate had with her students was important to her, and she wanted to be liked by her students, which seemed to be a constant concern for her.

I guess the role that I see is that I first have to get them to kind of trust me, and I’m thinking that knowing that I’m working with them and that I’m not working against them and that I want them all really to do good. And that I can become a part of the team for a short time during the four weeks and then go from there, then I guess part of my main goal is to try and become a part of the team for a short time. (Interview #1)

Since Kate saw herself as part of a team, it was no surprise that she got very attached to her students, and genuinely missed them when the course was finished. This idea of working as a team came from her comments that she saw herself working with the students in class and on class activities and involving them in some of the class
decisions. She also felt that she learned from the students, just as they learned from her. In order to be part of a team, she worked on establishing a comfort level so that students would be more open to sharing and interacting. Establishing this comfort level began with her always saying "hi" to students and asking them how their week had been, and showing an interest in them. She also worked with them on various class activities instead of paying attention to her notes or what she would be teaching next. Or in her words,

If they’re doing group work, if I’m just paying attention, I make sure that I don’t pay attention to only what I have to do or what I have to teach next or something like that, but I’ll work with the groups and go and say "hi" and ask how they’re doing and usually they will have questions and then they will come around. (Interview #1)

She also did not put any undue pressure on them in class by trying to embarrass them or demand answers from them.

I’m not going to embarrass them in front of the class or I’m not going to put them on the spot or put them.... I’m going to put them under pressure to do assignments, but I’m not going to put them under intense pressure that they can’t deal with or that they can’t feel that they can tell me that this is too much or something. (Interview #1)

She respected the students and tried to establish a trusting environment for them. She seemed to have been successful in establishing a personal relationship with her students because they rewarded her with small gifts and genuine comments that they would like to have her as an instructor again.
Because Kate was such an open person who valued the relationship that she had with her students, much of her teaching methods grew out of this concern for her students. She also saw learning as being fun. With these two ideas in mind it was easy to see that the lecture method did not seem to apply to the adult students that she taught. To her, students learned by doing and through their experiences so she employed a wide variety of activities to provide experiences for her students. Or as she described it,

I think that’s positive, that there’s any measure that they can learn in. So I really wanted to adapt as many examples as I could so I was meeting all the needs of people that were working and people that weren’t working. So it’s a combination to be able to pull out different examples so they could, they could relate. So it’s good. (Interview #3)

Two specific activities that she mentioned were sharing a real world experience for the class to analyze and having students take on different roles to see how groups function.

I actually put two different people in facilitative roles and they were to team facilitate the discussions and what they did, they did what they wanted. They split the class in half, and they sat in there, and they did their discussion with half the class, and that really encouraged the other people who don’t speak out that much to speak out and so those facilitators...what they did was they had an opportunity to be facilitators and actually use what they had been reading in the class, and so they got to draw that out and then also draw out everyone into talking more. And they had a lower threat level, I guess, of saying something that may be, um, maybe... I guess people have a fear that people won’t like what they say when they’re in larger groups so they don’t speak, but in this smaller group there were more people talking and voicing their opinions. They felt more comfortable to do that.
And I noticed because they did those small groups, it even came out in the larger group that they talked more. The other thing that I did is I had shared with them a progression of a meeting I was involved in at work and some of the memos that were put out and meeting minutes and I shared with them what I was getting and what was happening ....so I was explaining to them that situation and then they wanted to know what happened with the meeting. So I diagrammed it out....and so I told them what I was going to do and I told them how it went and then I told them how the group worked together and what my analysis would be..then I asked them what would they do with the next step. And so I had them identify the problems with the group from the information they had in the minutes and the agenda and then I asked them to put together what they thought should be addressed in the next meeting so then they had some, they had a situation that was a true situation. (Interview #3)

She also encouraged students to share their relevant personal experiences, and bring in current topics for discussion. In addition, she shared her own experiences and then demonstrated how she had analyzed a situation or what her thinking was in regard to that situation. In this way she was serving as a model for the critical thinking that she would have liked her students to do as well.

Kate was also very reflective of her teaching and was always striving to adapt what she was doing in the classroom to meet the needs of her students. Or as she said, "I like the experience of thinking 'OK, Remember what they said last week or last session and how can I incorporate that, or how can I share with them some more, or how can I restructure things?'" (Interview #1) She did this by observing the reaction of the class to the different activities that she
introduced and by asking the students for feedback on a weekly basis. She also observed that, "I guess my style, and all that, it only continues to develop as I go along" (Interview #1).

Possibly the best way to understand what the role of the teacher meant to Kate was to look at why she found teaching so rewarding. To Kate, "It’s watching people change. It’s watching people grow. It’s watching people accept new ideas.....I like challenging their minds and I would like to see them grow" (Interview #1). Not only did she find watching her students change and grow rewarding, but she also saw teaching as a benefit to her personally by keeping her mind active and by involving her in people’s lives. As she described,

I like that exciting part of using my mind like that.....I get to use my mind more when I’m teaching so that would be one thing that’s exciting for me. And I guess I always get to keep up with, I get to keep up with certain issues and the way people think about them. (Interview #1)

She expressed her joy in getting to know different people by saying,

I like having the opportunity to get to know so many people and different things about them - different personalities, and different life experiences. Everybody has their own story, and I guess I would rather do that than watch TV. (Interview #1)

The excitement and energy that Kate got from teaching was obvious throughout her interviews. She emphasized how much teaching was a positive experience for her when she
observed, "I just think it’s really, really a bright spot for my life" (Interview #1).

Perception of Students. Not only was Kate’s view of her role as teacher important to the learning experience, but how she perceived the students and their role in the learning process was also important. Her comments focused first, on her expectations of the students before she actually met them, which was followed by her assessment of this actual group of students and their reaction to her, and finally she discussed the changes that she observed in this group of students at the end of the course.

When Kate was asked to talk about her expectations of this group of students before she met them, she was hesitant to do so because she did not want to prejudge the students. In addition, she felt that regardless of someone else’s assessment of these students that they would be different with her, so it did not matter what they were like before they entered into a relationship with her as a teacher. As she put it so well,

I think that I would rather go in the situation and see what they are like because each of them...They have to adapt to my style too, and so it will evoke a different reaction. Their reaction as to someone of my personality type coming in...They’re going to react a certain way, I think. And I think that that’s part of the role, so I can’t really know what their conflict styles are going to be through my class until they interact with me, even though that un because I’m a factor too. They could have had...I could have had a bad day. I could have come in, and they may not like the tone of voice I’ve been using, and so they’re reacting to that. So they, you know, so
they could react that way and have a different style with me also. So they’re adapting to me also. I don’t think I’d want to know that information in advance, I guess, because I think it could... there are so many variables, I think it would change or it could change. I guess it’s kind of my idea that everybody is really a blank sheet of paper to me and so I hear them speak, or, um, or they interact with me, and they... I just really don’t think going in with an idea before hand is going to benefit me too much. (Interview #3)

For Kate, opinions and perceptions of the students were formed only after she had an opportunity to interact with them and get to know them.

Even though Kate was not willing to prejudge this group, she was able to identify some general characteristics of adult learners. There were two factors that she felt could influence how the students as a whole reacted to returning to finish their degree. These were the size of the group and the location of the group. She found in the three to four years that she had been teaching in this program that the larger the size of the group the less the commitment to finish the program. As she saw it, this was possibly due to the fact that with a large group some of the students seem to get lost and never become an integral part of the group. Smaller groups tended to be very supportive of each other and encouraged students to finish as a group. She also found that the location of the group had an effect on the students. In comparing students from this suburban area with those from the city of Chicago, she found that there was a higher level of self-confidence and belief that
they would finish than in the Chicago cohort groups. This was possibly due to the achievement expectations that were inherent in that particular community.

In general, Kate saw adult students as being very dedicated and responsible learners. Unlike traditional college students, according to Kate, adult learners were ready to learn and wanted to do their very best. They wanted to be good at learning and because they considered themselves successful in life they also expected that they would always get A's. Even with this intense desire to succeed and do well, Kate noticed that many adult students, especially in this first class, were questioning their ability to do the work and had some anxiety about being able to get all the class work and reading done. Since Kate saw a major part of her role as teacher as encouraging students to complete the program, she knew that eventually these students would figure out that they could do it.

One final expectation that Kate had of adult learners in this program was that they would come together as a group. She expected the group to become close and supportive of each other. She also expected that there would be very little competition among the students. Since the students would be together as a group for over a year, Kate saw that completing the program was a group effort. Her focus in her teaching reinforced this idea of building a team that was working toward the same goal.
Once Kate had met and interacted with this group, she found some of her general expectations of adult learners were true, but she was also able to see the unique characteristics of this particular group. Like most adult learners, Kate was able to see that this group did go beyond the call of duty and put a great deal of effort into their papers and their presentations. They were really trying to do the best that they could and were highly motivated. Also like most adult learners, some members of this group were struggling with self-esteem issues and were wondering if they could do it. However, she did not see a great deal of anxiety over the class work. Finally, as she expected, this group did grow together over the course of four weeks. They seemed to figure out a way to get along and work well together.

The specific characteristics that Kate noticed right from the beginning were that this was a very talkative group, who were very vocal in voicing their opinions. This could have led to conflict within the group, but Kate also noticed that this group had a good sense of humor, and the students were willing to be very open and honest with each other and had established a great deal of trust which contributed to their ability to get along. She also noticed that this group was a very artistic and creative group with three or four artists, and that they were very insightful.
and expressive. The range of experiences that these students had and their varied backgrounds also contributed to a richness in their classroom contributions and their papers and presentations.

Although Kate noticed that there were a lot of strong personalities in the group, she felt that there really was not a lot of competing among the students. This could be due to the fact that when the students took the conflict inventory that none of them used the competing style to resolve conflict and most of them chose either collaborating or compromising. Kate sensed that they also saw each other as equals.

One major difference that Kate noticed with this group was that there were two distinct views of why these students were there. Most adult students were in the program because they needed a degree to advance in their job or were planning to change jobs. As Kate noted this group was evenly divided between those who were doing it to get a better job and those who were doing it purely for the joy of learning. Many of the older students were taking this program solely for their own self-development and happiness. These people who were learning for the sake of learning were also the ones who asked more questions as Kate noticed.

Although the students shared with me their perception of Kate as a teacher, it was interesting to note Kate’s perception of how the students reacted to her. Kate felt
that the students liked her and thought she was doing a great job. She gave examples of how the group played a joke on her and that she interpreted that as liking. She also mentioned that the students would stay after class and talk to her which she also saw as positive feedback to her teaching. In the past, Kate’s students have kept in touch and even given her gifts. This class communicated that they thought it was a great class and expressed a desire to have Kate as a teacher again.

It was obvious that Kate felt that developing a relationship with the students was important. She sensed that students were open to talking to her and that they felt comfortable sharing with her some of their experiences. They seemed to appreciate her being real and human and sharing some of her personal experiences with them. In fact, Kate felt that the students wanted to know what was going on with her life. By sharing some of her personal life with them, Kate saw that it broke down the students’ fear of asking questions and sharing their own experiences, and that it made the students realize that she was human. Kate also noticed that there was a strong emotional connection between herself and her students. She felt that she was a part of the students’ lives and that they were a part of her life.

In considering any changes that Kate perceived in this group of students, the major change that Kate noted in this
group was that they actually grew together and became a
group. Students who basically started out as strangers were
becoming friends, and were getting along with each other
even though there were initially some strong personalities
in the group. The other interesting thing that Kate noted
was that the roles in the group seemed to change and that
the people who tended to talk a lot initially were now
listening more and that those who were quiet to begin with
were contributing more in class. She could also see that
the way the students communicated with each other was also
changing. However, Kate saw all of these changes as
positive ones that contributed to the group coming together
as a group.

Perception of Learning. Since the expectation of a
teacher is to cover a certain subject matter and encourage
students to learn, then how a teacher perceives the learning
outcomes becomes important. Looking at both what the
teacher expected to accomplish and expected the students to
learn, and what the teacher thought the students actually
learned provided an opportunity to understand what the
teacher sought to accomplish during the course.

Before the group actually met, Kate had some definite
ideas of things she would like the students to learn from
this course, and she definitely wanted them to leave
learning something. Because the program is set up to use
the group process as a way of learning, Kate’s primary aim
with this group was to get them to figure out just how they were going to work together. This involved being able to talk to each other and being able to deal with each other. Since the course was Dynamics of Group Behavior, this objective coincided with the major learning objectives of this course. However, as Kate saw it, the specific learning objectives of this course were all related to the behavior encountered in this particular group of students.

The second major objective that Kate had for her students was related more to her personal goal of encouraging them to stay in school. In order to encourage them, she wanted them to like being back in a learning environment, and her focus on learning as being fun probably helped the students in their desire to finish. She also wanted to influence their self-confidence in their ability to learn and to convince them to believe that they would finish. Kate’s own experience with instructors who had either encouraged her or discouraged her probably contributed to her desire to see that the students continued their education.

Aside from her desire to see students stay in school, Kate also expected that students would learn more about themselves. As students interacted with others in the group, Kate expected to see individual growth on the part of students in two areas. First, she expected that students would learn to deal with being accepted as themselves and
not as a role they had outside of class. Regardless of their status outside of class in the community or at work, Kate hoped that the students would realize that they were all equal in class and were all there for the common goal of learning something and finishing their degree. The second thing that Kate hoped was that the students would learn from the feedback they were getting from others in class. She also hoped that they would see feedback as neither good nor bad and would use the information they gained from it to grow.

Although Kate’s primary objective for this class was related to the course content, it was interesting to see that Kate had other learning objectives for her students. These other learning objectives seemed to focus more on personal learning or growth rather than specific theoretical concepts.

At the end of the course, Kate’s perception of what the students actually learned in class was strongly influenced by what she expected them to learn. As far as course content, she felt that students did learn the major objective of learning how to function as a group. She observed that they had learned how to interact with each other and how to get along. In the process of this learning to get along, Kate saw that they also learned that they could learn a lot from each other. Through the various class exercises that Kate described, it suggested that the
students were learning some of the specific objectives of the class as well. For example, during an exercise where Kate divided the class into two groups and had two of the students act as facilitators, the students did learn about being a facilitator in a group and were able to analyze what worked and what didn’t. In another instance, Kate supplied an example from her own work situation and had the students discuss how it should be handled. This particular example also pointed out to Kate that the students learned more when they were invested in and committed to what they were learning and that they were more excited about learning when they were part of the process. Not only were the students able to see how they functioned as a group, but according to Kate’s examples they were also able to analyze other groups and make suggestions for improvement.

Kate’s second objective of getting the students to believe in themselves as learners was also something that Kate felt the students had learned. She saw that they were building confidence in themselves and were recognizing that their own experiences were valid and important to the learning process. She also saw that students were learning that they could learn from each other.

Aside from the two specific objectives that Kate intended for the students to learn, she found that they were also learning how to learn. They were learning how to do specific things like class journals and writing assignments,
but they were also learning how to learn from various class activities, simulations, and discussions. According to Kate, they were learning how to learn in a non-traditional format.

**Personal Learning for Teacher.** Not only did the students learn in this particular course, but it was evident that Kate also learned from teaching this class. Since Kate actually believed that a teacher should be growing and changing, it was not surprising that she would mention some of her own learning that occurred. The most important lesson that Kate learned and which she mentioned repeatedly was that the class can’t always end on a positive note. This was particularly profound for Kate since she is such an up-beat type of person and strives very hard to make learning fun for her students. She was very upset when one of the activities that she introduced on team building turned into a very negative experience for the students. It brought out some very depressing work experiences that the students had and noticeably changed the whole tone of the class for that particular class period. After class, one of the students mentioned to Kate that it was all right for class to end on a negative note because life is not always positive, and negativity is more real. Seeing this experience as a real life experience helped Kate accept that not every class would end on an up-beat note.
Kate definitely saw that her style of teaching was continuing to develop, and she was always trying new and different things. It was through trying new things in class that she was learning how to become a better teacher. She even mentioned that she had tried two new things with this group. One was bringing in an actual meeting that she participated in for the class to analyze, and the other was giving other students in the class an opportunity to take on the role of facilitator. She also recognized that students seem to want to know more about the teacher, so she has changed in her style of teaching to be more real with the students and not come across as the expert.

Kate also learned through her teaching experiences that students might not see the immediate value of what they are learning, but that that was all right. She had come to realize that students may not see where their education will help them in the future, but that going through the process and being exposed to new and different ideas would eventually fit into their lives somewhere. As Kate realized, education was what the students wanted to do with it.

Another valuable learning and growing experience for Kate was in her perception and understanding of two different groups of people, the Generation Xers and African Americans. She recognized that through the class discussions in this group that she was becoming more aware
and more sensitive to the parents of Generation X. She didn’t see herself as part of that group or as part of the parents of that group, but she did value the insight that she was gaining from hearing students explain their experiences. She was also fascinated by the dynamics in the group with the African Americans. She noticed that sometimes they would all sit together, and she also realized that their self-esteem levels were not on a par with others in the class. This was an area that she would like to learn more about. She seemed delighted that she could learn from her students, and was able to see things from a different perspective.

Teaching was definitely an uplifting, positive aspect of Kate’s life, and she recognized that the positive feedback that she got from students definitely had an effect on her own self-concept and self-esteem. Kate felt that teaching had a lot of rewards for her. She particularly liked watching people grow and change and accept new ideas. She found teaching challenging, and it was a way of keeping her mind active. Keeping her mind active involved having "Ah Ha" experiences about herself and her teaching, and it also allowed her to keep up with different issues and what people thought about them. She also enjoyed getting to know so many different people and the fascinating life histories that they brought with them. Most importantly, she found teaching incredibly enjoyable and energizing, and seemed
genuinely pleased to be sharing her experiences with a colleague as part of this study.

Combined Student/Teacher Meanings

In understanding the meaning that both students and teachers derived from their classroom experience, it became necessary to look not only at what was meaningful or significant to the group and the teacher individually, but to also look at where the classroom experiences were meaningful to both of them. Since the students were coming to class with a particular objective in mind to learn something, it was possible that what was meaningful to them would not be meaningful to the teacher who approached the learning experience from a different perspective. In addition, it was possible that individual differences and experiences would make it impossible to find a common ground between teacher and student.

Similarities. In the case of this particular group and their instructor, Kate, there were some major events and common ideas that they all shared. The most dramatic event was an exercise on team building that the majority of students mentioned in their interviews and which Kate also brought up repeatedly in her interviews. This particular exercise or discussion occurred near the end of a class period, and its objective was for the class to understand what made a good team and to realize that they as a group could also become a good team. Instead, the discussion took
a decidedly negative turn, and students either didn’t understand the concept of team building or had had negative experiences with the concept at work. The whole class lost its earlier up-beat tone and momentum, and even Kate’s usual up-beat character was brought down. The class ended on a decidedly negative note, and everyone including the instructor was wondering what happened and felt bad that things had ended so negatively. In fact, the issue was brought up and discussed at the next class meeting because it had such a strong impact on the students and the teacher. This experience was clearly something that both the teacher and the students pondered over the ensuing week.

Aside from this rather dramatic event, another area where the teacher and students appeared to have similar perceptions of what occurred was in the area of content. The teacher was hoping and actually felt at the end of the course that the students learned how a group functions, and the students themselves mentioned that very topic as something that was covered in the course. Both teacher and students mentioned conflict management, but the teacher emphasized more the actual conflict styles that the students exhibited and very little mention was made of this by the students. It was also interesting to note that the teacher felt that the students learned a lot from this course while the students perceived that they learned very little.
In looking at the group as a whole, both the teacher and the students described the group in similar terms. The teacher saw this group as being talkative and very diverse, and the students also used those adjectives to describe the group. The teacher and a few of the students felt that the students were learning a lot from the other students in the class. They could also see that the group was coming together as a group and were learning and growing.

In the area of personal or individual meaning, the teacher and the students shared some similar perspectives on what this program and class meant to the students. Both the teacher and the students felt that the students were in the program to improve their career opportunities as well as learn and grow. Although the teacher perceived the students as wanting to grow and learn and that they were gaining valuable information about themselves from the feedback of their classmates, the teacher also felt that she was growing and learning. In other words, both the students and teacher saw this classroom experience as an opportunity to learn more about themselves and to grow from that experience. The students and the teacher also saw that the students developing a relationship with each other would be helpful to their own learning. However, the teacher also saw that developing a relationship with her students could help in her own learning and was an essential part to her gaining new perspectives.
The teacher’s perception of herself or how she wanted to be perceived by the students and the students’ perception of the teacher were amazingly similar. Both of them saw the teacher as up-beat, accepting, approachable, and as someone they could talk to. They both felt that relevant examples were used in class. Although the teacher mentioned that she was an example of a facilitator, the students definitely identified her main function in the group as that of facilitator. A few of the students recognized the emotional attachment that existed between teacher and students, and the teacher mentioned this as well. There definitely seemed to exist a mutual liking between teacher and students, and the students sensed that she enjoyed teaching them which she admitted that she did.

In regard to the non-traditional context, both the teacher and the students reacted to it in a very positive way. They both seemed to like the interaction approach and found that learning was fun. The teacher also felt that the students were learning to learn in this new way and were having fun which was one of her objectives for this class.

Differences. The one area where the teacher and the students diverged in their views of the classroom experience was in the learning that occurred. Although they both saw that the students were learning about learning, they tended to see different things that the students were actually learning. While the students focused more on learning about
themselves and others in the class, the teacher saw specifically that they were learning about how a group functions, and were coming together as a group. However, they both recognized that the students were listening to each other and learning from each other’s diverse experiences. The teacher also mentioned that the students were able to apply the principles of group dynamics to the various classroom activities, but unlike the students she did not identify that this was something that they could then take and apply to their every day lives.

In the final area of change, the students and teacher noticed some similar changes and some different changes. They both noted that certain individual students had changed their behavior. The teacher described this as some students switching roles. They also both felt that the students had gained a deeper understanding of each other and saw different perspectives. However, where the teacher saw the group changing and coming together as a group, the students did not see any changes in the group as a whole. This could have been due to a general comfort level that this group had from the beginning.

**Effective Interpersonal Relationships Course**

The Effective Interpersonal Relationships course was the third course in the sequence of courses that the students took in this accelerated degree completion program. Prior to this course, the students took Dynamics of Group
Behavior and Adult Development and Learning Assessment. The rationale behind this course being placed third in the sequence was that once the students had formed a learning group through the Dynamics of Group Behavior course that they would then gain a better understanding of themselves and other adults learners in the Adult development and Learning Assessment course. After the students had considered intrapersonal issues in the second course on Adult Development and Learning Assessment, the students were then exposed to interpersonal relationships with the background and knowledge of who they were as individuals. This course on Effective Interpersonal Relationships looked at not only verbal and nonverbal communication between people but was also focused on improving the relationship between those people. It was expected that the students would learn more about themselves and their relationships with others. The specific objectives of the course can be found in Appendix C.

Student Perceptions/Meanings

Since this was the third course in the sequence and the students had experienced three different instructors, the questions and the types of issues that arose focused more on differences and changes that occurred over that period of time. Because the courses in this program followed a sequence, it was difficult for the students not to compare the current course under investigation with previous courses.
taken. Once again the pattern of looking at the general areas of course content or subject matter, the group relationships, individual or personal issues, the teacher, the learning context, the perceived learning, and change were used.

Content. As explained in the first interview, the students used the term content to mean subject matter. In general, the content or subject matter for this course was familiar to most of the students since it dealt with the type of interaction that occurred almost on a daily basis with most people. Even though the material covered in this course was familiar to the students, they were better able to identify the specific topics that were covered and some of the specific activities that occurred during the class. In addition the majority of the students were able to discuss the content or subject matter on a more reflective level than they had in the past.

In general, the specific topics that were mentioned the most were communication, non-verbal communication and the three theorists, Rogers, Buber, and Buscaglia. In addition, listening, being real, self-esteem and depth and breadth came up as topics important to some of the students. As with the previous course under investigation, each of these topics was described more as material that was covered rather than something that had real meaning to their lives.
The topics that seemed to have some meaning for the handful of people who mentioned them were the concept of depth and breadth and the idea that all communication is persuasive. The first concept of depth and breadth was apparently new to the people who mentioned it, and it was something where the instructor gave numerous examples. Because of the newness of this concept and because of some vivid illustrations, the students who did focus on this concept really remembered it. As one student, Cindy, explained,

He taught us about depth and breadth, which means a subject and then from the subject that you present, pull out different areas of interest and different ideas from it instead of just what appears to be on the surface.

The other concept of all communication is persuasive struck some students as something with which they didn’t agree. Amy was referring to this concept when she explained,

When I raised my hand and spoke with Joe during his lecture, I told him I could not accept the word all the people all of the time. Okay, unless he could tell me that all 100,000 people, all 100 people, and it upset him.

Apparently, some of the students were not convinced that this was an accurate statement while others saw it as new information that they had not considered previously. Virginia showed a shift in her thinking on this concept with her comment,

the one thing that I decided that all communication... you’re selling. I couldn’t buy that at first, but the more I talked, and thought about it, it’s true. You know, we’re trying, you know, to sell something,
ourselves, or whatever, or a thought we have, or, you know. So I’ve learned that, I guess, in this class.

In addition to specific topics that were remembered, at least half of the students commented on the individual and group presentations that were made. Since this was the first time that this group of students had been required to make a presentation of any kind either as a group or as individuals, it was a new experience for them and as such seemed to have more meaning. These were also anxiety producing situations for the students. The individual presentations brought varied responses with students surprised at their own ability to do it and also at the ability of other students to complete the task as well. Diane’s response was probably the most dramatic. As she described,

What I mostly learned was that even though I was scared to the bottom of my toes, I was able to conquer that and give that presentation at the end. And that’s a really hard thing for me to do. I’ve volunteered to flunk a class in college rather than give a speech. Because I can walk into a crowd, pick a group, and hold the center of attention. But to stand up, all eyes on me, focused, listening to what I have to say, I fill my boots.....Even though I got tongue-tied and my brain got tongue-tied, I was shaken to the core, and Harriet said, "Aw, you did great! No. I didn’t even notice you were nervous." And I’m like, "Yeah, right, sure." Like I really didn’t believe she didn’t notice, but I felt that my voice was less shaky than other people’s.

Aside from being impressed by the presentations that were offered, the students were also concerned by the teacher’s evaluation of these presentations. It was obvious that they felt that some students who were graded down should not have
been, since the students were seeing how truly difficult it was for particular students to even attempt talking in front of a group.

The group presentations also brought a strong reaction because some groups became dysfunctional and others put in more effort but were graded lower. Amy, Diane, Kathy and Jessica were students in a dysfunctional group. Amy's view of this was as follows,

When he divided us into our groups to do our theorists, I got the best group. [said facetiously] I always get the same people. I get Jessica, and I get Kathy, and I'm not saying that they're not nice people, I'm saying that Jessica doesn't hear, and Kathy doesn't listen at all, and she's like in outer space. So, and then dealing with Diane who, she's got a dual personality. Sometimes she wants to be in charge, and then when it gets too tough for her, she wants to lie back and have someone cover. So, I let it slide for the, like the, first. I think that I wrote it up that Diane and Kathy had a fight in our group, and Jessica said she didn't care. So, we had our presentation due in five minutes and I said, "Listen we can't do what Carl Rogers wants us to do. Let's put on a play on how we interact saying this is exactly what he doesn't want people to do. Okay?" And Kathy says, "No, we can't do it." And I'm, "Hey, we only got five minutes. You come up with something else." We put on our play, and everyone was rolling. It was so funny because Kathy kept on doing exactly what she does. Diane kept on picking on Kathy, and every time I said to Jessica, "Jessica, what do you think?" and she'd say, "I don't care." At the end I did a summary on what we did wrong, and what we should have done in order to have groups work together which was from our first course, and Joe just loved it. He said it was really great.

All in all, both of these activities were highly emotional events for everyone concerned and as such were seen as more important or meaningful.
The majority of the students seemed to be able to reflect more on the subject matter and see how it applied to their own lives. The comment that was made by almost all the students was that they had become more aware of human behavior, both their own and others, and that they could apply what they had learned to the various situations that they encountered. For Cindy this meant that it was "so interesting. There's always something that you get to know or hear that you can file away, and then it will come up again, and you get to use it."

Although about one third of them felt that no new knowledge was covered in this course, some of them found that they were relearning old concepts but were perceiving them differently. Diane felt that she already knew about communication. I know that without the ability to listen and, I mean, try and really understand somebody and not just what they are saying, but the lines in between and the body gestures and the facial expressions and the posture. I've learned a lot of that, umm, over the years and in earlier education, but just from people in general because I'm good with people.

Evelyn shared Diane's feeling about having learned these concepts throughout her life when she said,

We practiced a lot of these things and learned a lot of these things while we were working. About being fully present for another person, accepting him wholly as he is and all of that kind of thing is terribly important and something that I had to learn as an adult. Any reinforcement of that is important.

These more in-depth observations about the subject matter and more awareness of the concepts covered were different
than the previous course. But once again, content or subject matter received much less attention than other areas.

Group Relationships. The students' comments about the group as a whole fell into three major categories: a description of the group, their personal reaction to the group, and an analysis of the group's behavior. As with the Dynamics of Group Behavior course, the students once again provided descriptive adjectives about the group. Almost every student described the group as closer and becoming more involved with each other. When asked about the group, Evelyn responded,

I think they've become much closer. I imagine it happens to most groups that work together. They learn to know each other. That's what it really is, and I think that it's a good group that is more involved with each other.

They also felt that they were more able to share personal experiences with the group, because they were more comfortable with each other. In Jessica's words "people are talking more and they're getting to know each other more." A few of the students felt that the group was very supportive and that "people are trusting more and opening up. It makes it a lot easier to understand each other" (Virginia). Cindy certainly felt this way, when she stated,

I think we feel more comfortable with each other. I think we're more trusting of each other's opinions and more supportive too. Because after I gave my talk, because I had told a couple of people about my autobiography, that it was too short, and several people came and said, "Hey, that wasn't short. You did
it. It was okay." I mean, that they really thought, and they knew that it was difficult for me, and they had taken that into consideration, but we need to get over that next. Anyway they were very supportive of it, and they had very good things to say.

In addition to these positive comments, one or two students also brought out some negative descriptors. For example, one student saw that differences were beginning to show, and two others felt that anger and frustration with members of the group were beginning to arise. Shirley felt it when she realized, "that people don’t embrace liberal mindedness. They don’t readily embrace that....that’s something I’ve been struggling with these last few days or last weeks I guess." Diane realized it when her small group became dysfunctional, and she actually in class lost my cool with somebody. Ummm, mostly Kathy, but just the, the, the three of them because I was getting no cooperation. So I had a confrontation with members of the group, you know, subgroup. Then there’s the large group in which we had not had a confrontation before, of frustration and anger. And we always seem to be able to blend so well as a large group. And so, I found it interesting that we had that little blow-up. Well, that Diane had that little blow-up. But it was understandable because of the level of frustration that was building.

Their personal reaction to the group was mentioned by fewer students and had very diverse responses. About one third of the students liked the group. Phyllis thought, "I’ve gotten to know some of the other people and I like the...They’re cool. I think I’m kind of learning more about them and how to work with them, what they’re like and their personalities." However, Kathy and Jessica still didn’t
feel comfortable with the group. Kathy revealed this when she said,

Joe mentioned this but I’m not going to admit it in front of that class, because I don’t feel that comfortable with them. I was looking for social approval from the class, but I can see how people can do that, that are easily sucked into it, and I’m not going to do it any more. I mean, you know, that’s it. I’m there to get a grade. I’ll contribute, but I don’t have to do that any more. I’m more secure.

Although there seemed to be a general positive feeling toward the group as a whole, some students pointed out that some members of the group didn’t like the grading and some didn’t seem to understand the assignments. Amy tried to describe Joe’s grading system with,

He doesn’t do 100 percents or a Bell Curve. He does like 78 percentile, like through 68 percentile, and it’s either an A or a B and it’s very hard for me to explain. It’s one of these situations where you have to be there...I got the third highest grade which was a 74. And one under me, okay, is really upset even though it was an A or a B because they didn’t think he was fair. They didn’t like the way he graded. They didn’t like the way he took off points. Evelyn’s was excellent. It was rather boring, okay. But it was excellent and in-depth. She got a low grade. Harriet, who really researched it and had some art work, she was very upset with her grade. Even though they were low, like, low A’s or high B’s, they didn’t like the way he graded them and criticized their work.

These last two comments were made not as a negative about the group members, but more in the sense of describing their behavior and either wanting to help or be protective of the other group members. Evelyn specifically stated this when she felt that Amy had been verbally attacked by the teacher early on in the course,
She [Amy] was really upset, and it was too bad because.. I don't like that kind of thing. Oh, yeah, it bothered me a lot. It made me feel like I wanted to protect her, but I thought, "She's a big girl. She can protect herself."

Unlike the Dynamics of Group Behavior course, more of the students (at least half) were much more reflective of the actual behavior of the members of the group. The students who did attempt to analyze the behavior of the group focused on the behaviors of specific group members and speculated on why these behaviors were occurring. Diane shared some interesting insights into her fellow classmates,

[On Amy] I found she has a lot of negative energy, and I realized that during this class. She doesn't realize that she has negative energy, but she does. [On Shirley] I like her very much. I think she's a little too serious for her own good though. I think she should lighten up. She'd enjoy life a whole lot more.

[On Kathy] I knew that there was something that bothered me about Kathy since the first class. I couldn't ever figure out what exactly that bothered me. But it was the fact that, that her reality is different than some of the others of us. Meaning, like, in her own life and in her own work place, she may have a very high functional level. But in concept and in theories in class, she catches on at a little different pace than some others. So there was a kind of lag time in there.

The students also felt that this being more reflective was due to the fact that as they got to know people in the group better, they were seeing more and learning more about their behavior and their motivation. A few students, especially the four members of the dysfunctional group, were very aware that one of the small groups became very dysfunctional and explained why that occurred. In addition, Shirley, Kathy,
and Richard began to analyze the group’s reaction to them. Shirley felt that she was

becoming more aware of people’s perceptions, I guess. Not so much as they relate to me because more and more people are telling me how they perceive me, and I sometimes have a problem with that because it’s usually all wrong. But, you know, it’s not who I really am, you know.

Overall, the students seemed to be more aware of the behaviors of the group and the individuals in the group, and more of the students were analyzing that behavior.

**Individual/Personal Issues.** The individual issues that arose during this course were as varied and unique as the students themselves. They commented on their learning, their grades, their self-concept, their relationship to others in the group, and their personal agendas. There was still a sense that being in this program was a valuable experience for the students, but they were much more concerned about how they related to the other people going through this experience with them. This included both the teacher and the other students.

Regarding personal issues, the main topic that more than half of the students commented on was the desire to learn more. Cindy was anxious to get back to school because "it must have given me a lot of things to think about. I want some more things to think about." They found this particular topic of interpersonal relationships fascinating and wanted to learn more. When talking about what she had learned, Kathy found that she
was totally unfamiliar with Buber before so he...This course helped me to understand Rogers more. I got more out of it. Some of the stuff that he brought in I was a little familiar with but he...like the self's the theory. I didn’t know about that and that’s very valuable, and it’s wonderful to know that.

Evelyn thought, "that this section is probably one of the most important sections of the whole class of how people reflect and meet each other, and I think it’s vital, certainly, and important to life." Some even said that they felt cheated because they wanted the course to be longer and more in-depth. Mary Ann wanted more teacher input because I did enjoy Joe standing there teaching us techniques as well, what to look for, what to observe. I don’t think you can learn that from the people that are students in the class. I think he’s a professional. He’s studied a lot of this, and he could relate that a lot better.

This interest in learning more seemed to stem more from this particular subject matter than from a change in their view of education.

The students in this group had originally been evenly divided in viewing education as a means to an end or as an end in itself. Although there were still comments that learning was important, there were more students who specifically stated that getting through the course and getting a good grade were now more important that learning. For example, Diane commented, "what it meant to me was that I basically had to take this course to get through part of this program. That’s what it meant." Some of the students who were now focused on the grade or just getting through
the course were some of the same students who had originally been more concerned with learning for learning's sake. Even though there was a strong desire to learn more, some of the students seemed to have lost their joy in learning. In fact, Harriet who had talked so eloquently about how she was only doing this for her own satisfaction, was now very upset that she didn't do well in this class.

It was more instructor class than it was interaction, I think, and it really left me breathless. He really just speeded on ahead. It was obvious that he was a psycho-therapist. He knew his material backwards and forwards. I'm not sure I know it after the four weeks, but I did learn how to listen, because I had a really big problem with that. We had a media paper, and media presentations, presentations on a conversation in the media. And he said several times, one conversation analyzed, one conversation. I had a great presentation, but it was on the whole film that I saw, and I was just amazed by the fact that I wasn't listening to what he said. I followed the directions in the student guide, and not what he said, and I didn't get my A. I didn't crack a book for about a week after that. I didn't even take my stuff out of the trunk. I was really mortified.

This emphasis on grades could be due to the fact that by the third course they were actually receiving grades and being evaluated, so that now figuring out what the teacher wanted became more important than the learning.

This change in attitude was also evident in the way they described themselves. There seemed to be more tension and frustration with themselves and their learning. Although at least four of the students were able to describe themselves positively with such adjectives as intelligent, empathetic, and accepting, there were a lot of students who
were upset or disappointed. They were upset with their own behavior, and also what was happening in class. Some of the students chasised themselves for not doing better in class, like not remembering the names of the theorists or needing to practice more of the skills that were learned or for taking things too personally. Shirley explained,

I try not to take everything so personally. My mother says you shouldn't take everything so personally, and I am trying not to take everything as, you know, a personal attack. But some times when you get it from all fronts, you just begin to personalize it because you don't see anybody else they're directing it to.

Evelyn expressed this feeling of doubt in her abilities by commenting,

I never felt on top of the situation for some reason and I don't know why. I thought am I having learning problems? It just didn't go easy for me, and then I thought, "Oh, gee, maybe I just can't learn as fast as I could." So with all of that mixed up in it, I know now what, where I missed out on the paper, because I didn't get down the information with the names of the theorists and tie either thing in the way it should have been. I know that. I guess I knew that was what he was looking for. I didn't give it to him. That's kind of short-sighted of me. I don't know why I did that.

They also expressed displeasure with other students by comments on being disappointed or frustrated or upset by the close mindedness or racial discrimination or lack of sensitivity to individual issues. The tone of this group from being very up-beat and positive about their learning experience seemed to have changed to being more critical and unhappy with themselves and the group experience.
On a more reflective level, the students seemed to be more individual in their focus and less concerned about fitting into the group. Phyllis felt that "you’ve got to be in tune, in touch with yourself before you can ever, ever bring anything anywhere." Amy echoed the same thoughts with,

I guess the best part of the three courses was the interpersonal relationships part where I’m trying to get in touch with myself. I mean, I know I’m there and I know what I should do. I just can’t do it, but at least it gave me a little bit bigger push to try and deal with myself before I can deal with other people.

This focus on the self could explain why there seemed to be more dissatisfaction with the group or the learning situation. The comments that were made about the group as a whole seemed to center on the idea that others in the group saw the world differently. Amy was frustrated with other students who didn’t understand, and expressed that frustration by saying,

It’s amazing that I’m in a group with college students and it doesn’t matter their age or their background. The information is in the book. It’s written on the board. And it’s explained to us and still there are five questions. "How many pages? When is it due? What does it have to be about?" This is our third summary paper. These people don’t get it.

Kathy felt that the other students were not very accepting of her, but that she no longer needed to be accepted by the group. She observed,

They accept me but they don’t necessarily like to, maybe they don’t. They wouldn’t pick me to work with. I’ve noticed that all along. Most of them would not. If they get into a group with me, it’s not by choice, unless they pick the same subject, but they don’t pick
me to work with. But it doesn’t bother me. I don’t care. I don’t care. I’m there learning. That’s it! There are some people that rather accept me and always have a little bit at a distance which is fine. I mean there are people that I like in that class. I like, oh, I like them all. You know, you have to separate the behavior from the person.

Another student saw that her personality type helped her tolerate the differences in others better. It seemed that as the group got to know each other better, they became more aware of their differences and now focused more on their own personal growth or realized that they didn’t have to be defined by the group.

Many of the students were able to see changes in themselves, and most of these changes were viewed positively. The students who did see these changes seemed to value knowing themselves better, and gaining insights into their own behavior. As Virginia put it,

I’m getting an overall picture of myself, and I’m trying new things and new relationships or in old relationships, particularly in the family, and they seem to be working, and I’ve gained confidence from that. But the overall thing, like I just did my portfolio, and I came out with much better feelings about myself than I would have had before. And the grade average that I had before. It just seemed like I didn’t realize how much I had going for me with it all. But I think that gets back into the interpersonal part of it, the communication. I’m seeing things that I like about myself. Now that’s not to say that I don’t have a lot of work to do. I get disappointed. In the overall picture, the whole experience from June has been a very positive one. Each one seems to be a little peg that I’m gaining a little more and a little more...confidence....I just feel better about myself in an overall picture. I think people used to take me for what I was on the outside and never what I might have on the inside. You know what I mean my thinking powers, things like that.
Some were delighted that they had succeeded at a difficult task, and increased their self-confidence. As Diane put it, "what I got out of it is, I was able to conquer a fear of mine." Cindy also recognized that

I’m having more confidence. A lot more confidence, and I don’t feel as awkward. I never felt like I was boring, but I never thought anybody else would be interested, you know, I don’t know if you know that or not, if you’ve ever felt that way. So it’s kind of nice to go that next step beyond that but it really doesn’t make a difference if they’re interested or not. It might be helpful if they know. They might perceive me differently, and it’s awful interesting too, because I’m not exactly playing a game, but I just have this different kind of persona, and some of the people I work with are really difficult. But if I bring this one persona to them all the time, consistently, and they know that that’s all that they are going to get, they’re not as difficult any more.

Others found that they were less bothered by things such as grades or arguments, and they liked being real and not superficial. They also recognized that they were growing intellectually as well. Some realized that they were doing more critical thinking and actually liked formulating thoughts and analyzing situations. Learning was definitely a very personal experience for many of these students.

Teacher. Of all the categories that the students commented on, the one that was mentioned first by nine out of the twelve was the teacher. Every single student had a definite reaction to the teacher and a lot of comments. In fact, much more was said about this teacher than the previous teacher. The general perception of the students in this class was that most of the group did not like the
teacher. The actual responses of the students when asked their opinion of the teacher revealed that only three didn’t like the teacher and even those three could find something good to say about him. Six of the students had positive reactions to the teacher, and three were indifferent. Some of the differing viewpoints were as follows. Diane liked "the style in which he teaches, though I know that it offended a few people in class." Mary Ann also thought, he was very good. Other people did not, so I’m sure you’ll get two different views. I can’t exactly remember right now everything that he had said, but in the course of the evening I thought he came up with some very good things to look for in terms of communicating with other people. And I do like the lecturing. I wouldn’t use that word "lecturing." I think he taught for specific things which were helpful. In the format for the evening, he followed specifically what he was going to do, and whatever the topic was he spent X amount of minutes talking about that specific topic. It flowed, and he began and finished with the entire format in the course of the evening. We did have a little bit of group interaction, but I don’t think it was enough.

On the other hand, Amy thought, "He’s very narrow minded and it’s his way or it’s no way. Half of the people in our class liked him. Half the people in our class did not like him."

In describing the teacher, the students focused on the teacher as a teacher, and his teaching style, and then a few discussed specific problems that arose with this teacher. As a teacher, the two distinct characteristics that students kept noticing about this teacher were that he was definitely an instructor, not a facilitator, and that he was a
motivational speaker. Cindy thought, "he was an instructor instead of being a facilitator." Amy identified him as "a motivated speaker," and Shirley summed it up by saying,

I found him at times to be more of like a motivational speaker than an actual... I didn't see him as a facilitator because he didn't facilitate. He didn’t let the class basically lead their own discussion and keep us on track. He basically set up the focus of the discussion and discussed it with our input. But it’s just, I don’t know, I got the feeling that this guy is, you know, wasn’t quite dealing with us as students but more as someone paying some money to hear him give a motivational speech.

The fact that this teacher lectured more and was in the students' view an instructor was actually considered a negative trait by some of the students. Other negative descriptors were that he was narrow minded, very analytical, and patronizing in his approach to the students. As a motivational speaker, some students viewed him in a more positive light. Some students noticed that he was very articulate, knowledgeable, and had a great accent so it made it easy to listen to him. Cindy found it very funny because he’s articulate. He’s also from Kansas so I like him really well. He has a great accent. Although he says it’s because he’s got a deviated septum, it’s not. It’s because he’s from Kansas. You can’t fool me.

The majority of the comments that students made regarding this instructor focused on his teaching style and not specifically on his personal traits. Most of the students recognized that this instructor was very structured and had specific objectives that he wanted to cover each class session. Harriet said, "he very definitely had an
agenda, and he wasn't going to let anything stop him from completing his agenda. It was more instructor class than it was interaction, I think." Cindy echoed this idea that he came with a mission every week, and there were certain things he was going to cover, and he had a method, and it was really kind of hard for him the first couple of weeks, because he didn't want feedback. I mean, he just wanted to get on with what he wanted to express, and then go from there.

They found him to be very organized, and he seemed to want total control. A few of the students were impressed that the examples he used in his lectures really made the theories come alive for them. Diane described it best with, he used a lot of examples and stories that I was able to relate to. So, it was, I liked it. I enjoyed the method he taught. And I think that he gave us extra information that wasn't in the books, just from the way he described some of his extra stories and things. So, I was pleased.

Although the students did not suggest that being highly structured was a negative teaching quality, it did give rise to some complaints.

The major problem that students encountered with this instructor had to do with his feedback. The students recognized that this instructor because he was so highly structured was rigid and not flexible, and as Cindy said "didn't want feedback" from the students. They also felt that he didn't want any interaction or participation by the students, and only wanted specific answers to his specific questions. Evelyn pointed this out by explaining that his style "wasn't a participatory thing, or there were parts
where he would ask questions, and then show you how you had the wrong answer. I don't, I didn't feel that he knew who we were." Some students were particularly upset by this lack of participation, because they disagreed with statements the instructor made regarding communication as persuasion, empathy, and non-verbal communication. Evelyn also found that she objected to one thing right from the start. Joe [the instructor] said, "To empathize with somebody you become the other person." And I said, "Whoa. I can never become another person." He said, "Yes, you can and I'll prove it to you." And he insisted and insisted, and just as I do when I come to an argument like that, I say to myself "Forget it. You've got your opinion, and he's got his." He insisted that you can become another person. He said, he talked about somebody that he'd worked with who saw little green people, and he said, "Yes, he believed that she saw little green people." Well, he didn't quite say it that way, but at any rate he intimated that he became that person and saw little green people, and I said, "You can't do that. The little green people are not there, and you never enter another person's fantasy or delusions." I said, "You can understand that they see it but you can't see it." You know what I mean? I had this feeling that boundaries were not as important to him as they are to me and respecting the boundaries.

These students felt that the instructor was not open to being questioned or contradicted, and consequently they chose to retain their position on the topic, but to keep quiet about it. Again Evelyn saw it as Joe, the instructor, being defensive. First of all, when he first started talking, he didn't expect to be challenged the way he was, and this class is used to speaking out. And when he'd say something, or he'd say, "Would you buy that?" They'd say, "No."

As far as feedback from the teacher, the students first of all did not understand what the teacher was expecting from
the assignments, because they felt the instructions were not clear. Mary Ann, who really liked his teaching, mentioned one problem that she had,

it was that I wasn’t sure exactly what he wanted us to do in the media presentations. Well, whatever we did, he seemed pleased, but then his grading system seemed a little off and that. I’m just not sure exactly what he wanted.

They also felt that he didn’t give feedback, or if he did, they did not understand it. All of this confusion on the part of the students about what the teacher expected on assignments led to at least half of the students feeling that the teacher was unfair in his grading.

One specific problem arose when Amy questioned the teacher’s position on a particular issue. Amy consequently felt verbally attacked by the teacher and misunderstood. Other students were also aware of this situation, and Evelyn was very upset by the way one of her fellow students had been treated. Evelyn expressed her concern by saying,

the first little bit of class was rather unfortunate, because it makes me very unhappy when I hear somebody yell at somebody else, and he did yell at, oh what’s her name? You know who I’m talking about. [Amy] Yeah, and I don’t think he was even aware that he did it.

Most of the other students also recognized that the teacher probably was not aware of what he had done to offend Amy. This event seemed to have a negative impact on some of the students’ opinions of this teacher.

Some of the students were able to step back and look at the teacher’s behavior and offer reasons for it. The
observation that occurred the most was that the teacher really did not know the students and was not involved with them. Amy pointed out that "he doesn't know our class after three weeks." If he had been more involved with the students, they felt he would have known when he had alienated Amy by his comments and would have appreciated student growth more. The students also expressed surprise that someone teaching interpersonal communication was not good at interpersonal relationships with the students. Amy again commented,

I think anyone who has that type of education and that kind of psychology degree and is teaching a course on relationships and communications, if he's going to teach how to communicate with other people, he should have been able to communicate with the people in his classroom.

Evelyn also thought, "for somebody who supposedly understands communication, he didn't show that kind of understanding. He understood theory, he understood behavior, but he didn't really, to me, understand what people were saying." Mary Ann, who loved the way Joe taught, thought,

he really wanted to be friendly and nice and supportive. But I really do feel that he's probably an introvert who is teaching and is very comfortable perhaps teaching, but personally he says things that come out the wrong way and offend people, because I think he was really a nice man.

Mary Ann seemed to have spent more time talking with the teacher on a one to one basis, so she was able to offer additional insights into his behavior. As she explained,
I wasn’t really sure that he felt comfortable with groups... He seemed very different when he was teaching than when he was talking to us on a personal level during break or before or right after class. When I asked him a question, he seemed almost shy. In class he was very on. He was very different, because he would come down and talk to us while we were on break at the end of the stairway there. He was a very different person. He would talk about how he was raised in a small town, and I would ask him a question, and he’d say, "Oh, that’s just fine." But in class he was very on. He was more of a performer. Very comfortable teaching and less comfortable, I think, on a personal basis. But I think he wanted to be friendly.

From Mary Ann’s explanation, it seemed that although Joe was a very dynamic lecturer that he was really a very shy person and because of that was not aware of offending students and was afraid to be himself with students. He also didn’t seem comfortable with the group. This in turn led to some of the students not being comfortable with the teacher. In fact, Evelyn felt that,

when he talked about body language it was in a way kind of being a voyeur, how you can really see how people really feel not the way that they say they feel. And actually to be perceptive, it’s good to know it. But it wasn’t in a kind way and that turned me off. So it made it very difficult to work with him.

This perception of the teacher as a voyeur of human behavior instead of a participant would correspond to the students’ view of him being shy as a person.

A few of the students also tried to understand why some of the students liked the instructor and others didn’t. They came to the conclusion that the instructor reached or responded positively to the students who liked him and
responded negatively to those how didn’t. Amy described it this way,

The people who liked the traditional class where the teacher stands up there and tells you what to put in your notebook, they liked him. The people who like to think and work on their own and be independent really did not like him or his way of teaching.

Evelyn was also curious about why some people adored him. Some people really liked him, and I found that very interesting. Because when I don’t immediately cotton to somebody, it’s very interesting to me to see that other people do, and there’s something about me about the..about me and that person that’s making that happen. I don’t necessarily show it, which I don’t think I did, but maybe I did. I don’t know. But he obviously was reaching other people who really liked him.

By way of explanation, Evelyn felt that it might have something to do with personality types. I think that the way that he presented the material was in an organized way, in a way that they could accept A, B, C, D, E. It didn’t work that way for me. I don’t think it was the intuitive ones that responded to him.

In order to check out her perception about the intuitive personality types, I looked at the students’ scores on the intuitive part of the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey and Bates, 1978). What I found was that the students who expressed the strongest dislike for the instructor actually did score the highest on the intuitive part of the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey and Bates, 1978). In contrast to this, the students who liked more structure seemed to really appreciate and like the structure this teacher provided.
Context. Even after this third course in the program, students were still adjusting to the non-traditional context. For the most part the student comments in this area were more positive to the non-traditional approach, and the students were seeing the value of non-traditional learning. One or two students in particular were still having a hard time breaking away from their traditional expectations of the learning context.

The positive comments that were made about the non-traditional learning context focused on how enjoyable the experience of learning was. The students liked the fact that there were no tests and that a lot of the negative overtones of "school" were missing. Cindy even referred to her previous school experience as "torture." This last part could be partly due to the fact that this particular group was meeting in a hotel conference room instead of a regular classroom, which Virginia pointed out when she said,

We were in an office building totally unschool like, and the idea that I wasn’t forced to go into a per se school room and think about big tests, all of that, that my learning was valuable. You see that would be another area where people would put me down or could put anyone down for that matter. But school was a very negative period in my life, not all of it, but a great deal of it and this...I even like meeting in the hotel because it’s so off-campus. It’s sort of like...Well, I’ve opened my mind because I’m not put in the structured area. I’m not saying that I couldn’t learn from that, but this is easier.

The comment that was made most frequently was that learning in this context was so interesting and fun that they were not aware of the time, and were always surprised when class
was over for the night. In fact, Cindy couldn't believe how fast class time flew, "Four hours is like fifteen minutes. I can't believe it's so fast. It's so interesting." The specific impression of the non-traditional approach was that it allowed students to express themselves and to challenge ideas and not be judged for it. The impression Amy got "from the program is that we don't have to accept anyone's theory, and we are allowed to challenge it." As a result of this freedom of expression, they felt they gained a more thorough understanding of the concepts and what they were learning than in a traditional lecture/memorization context. The students also expressed more openness to new ideas and were able to see different ways of learning because of the non-structured approach. They also were beginning to understand and appreciate the sequence of the courses in the program. Because of the extensive use of small group discussion in this non-traditional program, a number of students saw that this was almost like group therapy. "Sometimes I think I'm in a therapy session" was a comment made by Kathy. Mary Ann also felt this way and questioned whether that was education or not.

When you have groups like this, a group situation of adults, primarily women, does it usually turn into? I thought for awhile we were just getting into group therapy. Is that a learning experience? I know it's a learning experience, but is it an educational experience? How can I put it? Is this the place for that?
Part of that perception could also be due to the material covered thus far in the program. In general, the response to the context was very positive, and people were surprised that they were learning so much.

The few negative comments that arose actually reflected more personal limitations. For example, Shirley, who had to travel a great distance to attend class, found that by ten o’clock she was so tired that she could not retain any more information which was reflected in her comment, "Because once it hits ten o’clock, I’m out of here. You know, it’s been a long day. I have another thirty-five to forty-five minute drive." A few students also expressed difficulty with writing and found that the emphasis on writing instead of multiple choice tests made the non-traditional approach hard work. Richard explained this with "I have to tell you, the writing part, I’m finding it hard. But that’s going to be hard for me no matter what, whether an essay question or whatever. It seems like it’s difficult." One student even wanted less writing so that it would give her more time to think about what she was learning. Two students did express a dislike for experiential learning and part of that could have been due to being uncomfortable working in groups or that they wanted more expert (teacher) input and didn’t like learning from their classmates. Since the positive comments far outweighed the negative, the general impression I got from this group was that they really liked and were more
comfortable learning in this non-traditional, experiential context.

Learning. Although the students did not have much to say about the specific subject matter covered in the course, they did seem to feel that they were learning a great deal. The comments that related to their learning fell into four categories. These were: that they saw how to apply what they were learning to their lives, that they were learning about themselves, that they were learning specific concepts, and that they were learning more about the process of learning.

Most of the students made some kind of comment about applying their learning to their lives. They recognized that in their own lives they were paying more attention to the communication that was occurring around them and understanding it more on a deeper level. One particular area that was mentioned was paying attention to and observing more non-verbal communication, and also the different styles of communication. Amy pointed out,

I learned non-verbal action. The only thing I could say that I learned was how you can read a person with their non-verbal actions. I realized it, but I thought it was a mood or something. But eighty percent of what you don't hear is what you hear. So, I focused most of this course and my learning on non-verbal behavior. So, it's not what the person says, it's basically their terms, their tone, their eye contact, their posture, what they're doing with their hands, how they stand, how they dress, how they act. So that's what I basically got from Joe.
However, one student pointed out that although applying what they were learning to their lives was good, it was important to remember that people don’t always act like the theorists say they do. Phyllis expressed some of the difficulty she was having with applying what she was learning,

I think I can probably try to do it better. Listening. Yeah, there was a lot of things for me, like listening and being right there and not judging it. You know, all the stuff that you can do wrong, but really refine it. It’s easy to read it and write about it. But sometimes it’s harder to really, really try to do that every single day. And like "being and seeming," if I were continually being...sometimes you...sometimes in every single situation I would be crazy [especially working in a hospital]. We were talking about that. Sometimes I think I can. I try to be. It’s frustrating sometimes. So, I have to get my job done, and I can’t every second. We were talking about that in school. It’s doable. Their theories I thought were...I liked them...they’re like Utopia. People don’t act that way. It would be nice.

They also recognized that they needed to improve their own communication and to listen to really hear. This need to improve their own communication brought out specific concepts that a few of the students had learned. For example, they learned you can’t believe everything that people tell you, and distance and emotions can interfere with communication. A few students felt that they had gained insights into empathy and perceptions of others. Students also felt that they were learning a lot about themselves in this course since it was focused on personal interactions. Mary Ann felt that "I’m really doing a lot of internal searching and a lot of things are coming out that I didn’t know were there....for me personally. It’s even
almost like self-therapy." Many of the students felt that
the course helped confirm their previous beliefs and
knowledge and gave them a theoretical basis for those
beliefs.

Although students felt that they were learning about
themselves and how to apply what they had learned, the most
interesting thing that the students said about learning was
that they were learning about learning. Most of the
students were surprised that learning was fun, but they
recognized that they had a lot to learn, and that critical
thinking was good. Virginia, in particular, saw this when
she said,

That's sort of been growing from the first time I went,
you know, that critical thinking is good. So, I
honestly have to say that it's sort of been growing.
I've seen the void in me by not mentioning or maybe not
even being able to identify it at first, and now I can
sort of identify it and say, "Oh, that's what critical
thinking is. That's putting your thinking powers in
action." As I say, it started in the first, and the
second and the third [course]. I don't think I would
have come to that conclusion or wanted to work on it if
I hadn't had it right from the beginning. Because a
lot of this is critical thinking. I mean, for
instance, I don't have to agree with Buscaigua, or with
Buber or Rogers. I mean because they're written,
doesn't mean that they're right. That's what I'm
talking about critical thinking. That you know, no
matter who it is or what it is, I have to come to my
own decisions about things.

They also recognized that they were learning how to learn
and were being given a method for thinking about human
behavior. Almost half of the students felt that writing
journals was very helpful and was important for summarizing
their learning and for bringing out insights.
One of the major observations that most of the students made about learning was the impact the group had on their learning, both negatively and positively. Students found that they were learning from others in the group and that they were affected by the interaction that occurred in the group. The different aspects of this were that not talking in class could hinder learning, but that one student dominating the class could also prevent others in the class from learning. Richard pointed this out when he said, "you could take and talk one week the whole time and dominate the class and then nobody will gain anything from it." They recognized the value of applying the theories to classroom interactions and that this helped to better understand other members of the group as well as themselves. This revealed that many of the students were actually using the classroom as a laboratory for observing human behavior and for experimenting with different types of behavior.

Some of the students came up with some interesting observations about the things that affected their learning. As mentioned earlier, Amy observed that learning can occur everywhere which related to students being able to apply what they had learned in the classroom by stepping back and observing the behavior that was occurring around them. Another student commented that her learning was definitely affected by the teacher and the topic, while two other
students found that emotions and anger can get in the way of their learning. Virginia felt that

definitely the books, the instructors have been important, the group has been important. It’s kind of a microcosm too. When you have a group like that, to sit and look into people because that group has been very sharing, and that’s been very good. I think it would probably be a combination of all of the above. Why am I learning? I feel good, you know, when I’m learning. I feel younger. I feel better.

It was interesting to see that the students were becoming much more reflective about their own learning and were aware of those things that could possibly affect it.

Change. Because the students had now completed three courses in the program, it seemed more appropriate to see if they could recognize any changes that were occurring. When asked about changes that they had observed, the students mentioned changes that they noticed in themselves and in the group as a whole, and a few of the students also noticed changes in other students in the class.

The changes that students noticed in themselves focused mainly on personal growth as a result of what they were learning. For example, almost half of the students commented that their communication had improved both at work and at home. Cindy explained this by saying,

I’ve watched people differently when they’ve talked, because I’m trying to figure out where they’re coming from. It may not be honest, but if that’s something they feel comfortable saying, their comfort level. And I’m also trying to be, it’s very interesting, because on a real, you know, sometimes you’re really personal in an impersonal way or maybe you do things in an extremely personal and up close way, but you don’t have to get involved. But I’m finding that for some reason
or another I’m able to connect a little more deeply with these people, and it’s helpful. I think it’s more helpful for them. It’s necessarily more helpful for me. Because it doesn’t, it doesn’t affect how I do my job, but it does affect their outcome. And I’m also able to express what I think I’m doing and kind of not stand up for myself, but tell people what I’ve been doing and what I’m trying to achieve. I never did that before so my supervisor never knew what I was doing.

Specifically, this improvement in communication focused on being able to work through conflict better, listening better and knowing themselves better. They also felt that they could connect with others more deeply. The students also expressed an increase in awareness, and an increase in their ability to observe and analyze human behavior. About half of them recognized that they were now able to look at human behavior and not judge it, but were able to step back and analyze it instead. They also expressed a lot of personal growth. This growth stemmed from challenging themselves to do things that they had not done before like give a speech. This in turn led to feeling more secure and confident as a person, and as a result they were happier and were able to understand themselves better.

The major change that most of the students noticed in the group as a whole was that it was closer. They noticed that they seemed to know each other better and were friendlier towards each other. Along with being closer, they saw the group as being more open and accepting and as a result people felt more comfortable discussing personal issues. Specific people within the group who were observed
as changing the most were: Richard, who was becoming more open; Jessica, who was actually coming out of her shell; and talking more, and Cindy, who was also changing in her confidence levels.

Summary. In general there were more comments in all areas than in the previous course. This could be due to the fact that they had more experience in this learning environment and had something to compare this course to. However, the one area that seemed to receive the most attention and have the most meaning was the students' reaction to the teacher.

When students were asked the initial question of how was this course, the first comment that came out was in regard to the teacher. Whether positive or negative in their reaction to the teacher, this particular teacher had a strong impact on the students. The comments that ensued seemed to relate more to their personal reactions to the teacher and the course and less to the group as a whole.

Other areas that were important were that the students were able to notice changes in themselves and their learning and also changes in the group as a whole. More students were feeling more self-confident and were seeing that they could apply more of what they were learning to their lives. They also noticed that the group was becoming more open and sharing and trusting more.
The one area that received the least attention was the content or subject matter. This could have been because there was very little new information that was presented, and it was subject matter that was very familiar to the students. In general, the relationship that the students had with the teacher and with each other seemed to have a definite impact on their learning and meant more to them than the actual content covered.

Teacher B Perceptions/Meanings

Description. Joe, the second instructor in this study, was quite a contrast from the first instructor. He was much more reserved and quiet than the first instructor. As a white male in his late forties, he presented himself as a very structured, self-confident individual. Although this instructor has a sense of humor and a genuine concern for his students, these characteristics were not immediately evident upon first meeting him. His calm, reserved demeanor was more like stereotypical teachers or at least college professors.

When asked how he got into the field of teaching, Joe pointed out that "my mother was an English teacher and I don’t think that there was any doubt that that was what I was supposed to be" (Interview #1). Because of her influence, Joe began teaching at the age of seventeen at a summer camp and has been teaching ever since "in one form or another" (Interview #1). Aside from his mother providing a
role model, Joe also saw his "decision to become a teacher was in reaction to something else where you can fall back" (Interview #1). Aside from being a teacher, Joe had always had a strong desire to fly, but his interest in flying waned after three years as an Army helicopter pilot. It was at that point that he decided to become a teacher. "That was a conscious blatant decision that's been the best one I've ever made, and I've never wavered from it, even though there's been ups and downs" (Interview #1). Because of his fascination with studying people, Joe's educational background included a Bachelor of Science in Education with a major in psychology and a Master's and Doctorate in psychology.

Shortly after receiving his Bachelor's degree, Joe's first teaching experience was in a small Midwestern high school. "I taught English and communication, some psychology although they didn't have much, but I was a debate coach, and that was my forte" (Interview #1). After a couple of years teaching high school, Joe went on for his advanced degrees and taught at a major university where classes were huge lecture halls with hundreds of students. Because Joe enjoyed the interaction with students, this type of teaching soon became tedious, and he tried his hand at counseling. He described counseling as listening to the same problems over again, and this too lost its challenge. He has been teaching full-time at NLU for the past three
years in the Psychology Department with most of his classes being off-campus. NLU was particularly appealing to him because of the small class size and its focus on excellence in teaching.

Unlike the previous instructor, Joe had formal teacher training and more than 20 years of college teaching experience. The impact of his strong background in traditional education was evident in the interviews as he described his role as a teacher, his expectations of the students, the learning outcomes that resulted, and some of his personal learning that occurred. It is these areas that will be discussed below.

Perception of the Teacher. Since a teacher plays an integral role in the teaching/learning process, it was important to understand how Joe saw his role as a teacher. In explaining his role in the classroom, Joe not only defined the role of a teacher in general, but also described his own approach to teaching with a specific emphasis on how he went about the task of teaching.

When asked what it meant to him to be a teacher, Joe succinctly answered, "It means to promote change" (Interview #1). This desire to have an impact on students so that they were not the same at the end of a course was very important to Joe. In fact, it was watching people change and knowing that he had a role in that change that made teaching so rewarding for Joe.
As a teacher, Joe realized that initially he intimidated the students and they were afraid of him, but he also knew that if he could get past that initial reaction that the students usually ended up liking him. As he explained, it was possibly because I come on so strong, and so consequently they’re a little suspicious. They’re a little suspicious because it’s a new instructor any way. But by an hour into the first night that melted, and so I get them to laugh. I get them to get interested in some things so by the second night that’s all nice and comfortable and everything.” (Interview #2)

What was interesting to note was that as a therapist, Joe was seen as being warm and non-threatening, but in the classroom even colleagues who had observed him were afraid of him initially. Although Joe was very open to changing his teaching style, he had tried just about everything to alleviate this initial impression but to no avail. So he had given up and learned to accept this initial reaction knowing that it would change over the duration of the course. He did however, offer an explanation for why this was occurring, "maybe it’s because I’m frightened" (Interview #2).

Joe did explain his techniques for getting students to relax more and accept him more. He explained that "I challenge them with the questions and then as they start to give me the answers then I lead in with the concepts and then that starts to melt them" (Interview #2). He also switched from using lectures "to small group interaction,
group discussions which I'm not involved in and some lecture discussion, but not lecture" (Interview #2). It was apparently through more interaction with the students that Joe was able to get the students to become less frightened of him.

Another personal aspect of Joe was that he was very concerned about his students and felt responsible that each and every student learn and grow in his class. If a student was having some difficulty, Joe would try his best to help that student understand. He would even have consulted some other teacher or administrator, if he felt the student was having major difficulties. His strong sense of responsibility in reaching and motivating his students was revealed when he said,

If the coach loses the football game, no matter what happens you're still responsible. That's your job. And if I were to say that I didn't have any responsibility, I would be shirking that responsibility. Although I realize realistically my limitations, one student wouldn't have finished under anybody given the same circumstances. But once again you can't shove it off...because it was my responsibility. In fact, I'd really rather flunk somebody because of incompetency then have somebody not finish it. Because maybe they weren't motivated or something so that's my responsibility. (Interview #3)

Reaching every student in class was a challenge to him, and he felt he had failed if he didn't reach them all. "If I have two or three get out of there without learning what you want them to, see that's failure to me. But I can't
remember a class that I’ve taught where I felt good about everybody" (Interview #2).

When asked to describe how he taught, Joe once again answered with a short, simple answer. He taught by lecture and discussion which revealed his long experience in the traditional classroom. As he described it,

because I cut my teeth on the large lecture classes, I’ve almost become a performer there. And that I can’t get rid of, so when I try to teach cohort groups, I have to really minimize that and throw it back to them. And that’s good for me though, because I’m learning to develop a new style. (Interview #2)

This idea of entertaining the students was one that kept reoccurring when Joe would describe his methods of teaching, but at the same time he would express a desire to change to a more interactive approach. As he explained,

I especially know if I start entertaining them again, then I don’t have a problem at all trying to predict what their reaction is going to be. But so back to that idea of trying to change the style...teaching that way’s going to be more of a challenge for me, and it’s less predictable for me. (Interview #1)

The sense I got was that Joe was having a difficult time with his attempts to change his style of teaching to a more non-traditional approach. Because he was not always successful when he would try something new, he would revert back to his tried and true method of putting on a show (lecturing) for his students.

The new method of teaching that Joe was trying out was more non-traditional teaching which involved a lot of
student interaction with the teacher acting as facilitator.

Joe described this as the cohort method and shared some of his difficulty with attempting to change his style of teaching. His perception of the cohort method was where I try to get them to interact, and teach each other. That will go on the average for awhile, and then I’ll start entertaining. And then they’ll reinforce me for that and then that’s where it will go. And it’s very hard not to, not to let that happen. And so the last time I taught it, I did a pretty good job. I backed off of the entertainment more than I ever had before and it didn’t go as well. And some of... a couple of the evaluations out of eighteen were not the best, and so that was a little bit below average, and then I got some verbal negatives from a couple of them. And I know full well if I would have just walked in there and entertained the hell of out them for four classes none of that would have happened. And so, I’m not saying that’s necessarily a detriment to all of this. What I’m saying is that that’s the challenge. I’m trying to learn how to do that, but I’m having a terrible time. And if they hassle me too much, then I’ll go back to the old style, because I know I can depend upon it. Anyway, so that’s one of the reasons I like to teach for different areas, because I’m trying to change all that. Because one of these days, I said that before, I would like to accomplish the ideal of teaching one class without, without what I’m calling entertainment. (Interview #1)

Although Joe was having some difficulty changing his style of teaching, it was obvious that he genuinely enjoyed teaching and watching his students change and grow. He took his responsibility as a teacher very seriously and was always trying to improve. To him, one of the challenges and joys of teaching was to be able to reach and teach every student in class.
Perception of Students. Joe’s perception of his students was very thoughtful and could almost be considered psychoanalytical in its approach. When asked repeatedly if he would like to know anything about his students before he got into the classroom, he didn’t feel it necessary because he could pick up and analyze them the first time he met them, "because one of the first things that I do, is try to get to know them, and get them to talk. So I can understand what they’re interested in" (Interview #1). He also felt that since he had been teaching so long that, if he taught a certain way or did certain things in the classroom, he could easily predict the students’ responses. As Joe put it, knowing specific things about his students before hand, "I don’t think it would change my style at all" (Interview #2). In fact, knowing about the actual physical location was more important to Joe than knowing about the students ahead of time. Joe expressed nervousness about his first encounter with the students, but he knew that it stemmed more from being in new, uncomfortable surroundings and not from the students themselves.

In discussing what he expected from adult students in general, Joe didn’t expect he would get many surprises from the students he would be teaching, because he had taught for so many years. He did expect that they would be "generally good students" (Interview #1), and that they would be motivated and work harder than more traditional students.
As he pointed out, "They are much more motivated. They work harder. You don’t have to entertain them as much. Although they put up with less nonsense from you, they work you harder, and they expect more from a teacher" (Interview #1).

Joe also knew that the majority of the class would respond positively to him and his teaching, but that at least one or two students would react negatively. He based this prediction on many years of compiling information from his student evaluations. As he explained,

out of 100 evaluations, no matter what the class was, 90 of them would be the best markings, and only 10 would be low, but I’ve never been able to get rid of that 10 percent. I always manage to upset probably one person in every class, and it’s followed the same pattern for years. (Interview #1)

Besides the students being motivated and in general positively inclined toward the teacher, Joe also expected them to be normally distributed according to IQ and that their personality traits would also be normally distributed for college students. Even with being able to predict so much about the students prior to meeting them, Joe was still excited about the prospect of meeting this group of students, "because they’ll be different. I’ve never met them before, and it’ll be fun and it...will never get dull and drag" (Interview #1).

After Joe had met this particular group of students, he was asked to describe them, and he saw no significant
difference between this group and previous groups that he had taught in this program. His general predictions about adult students also applied to this particular group. As he described, they were

typical ABS, a little rowdy, interruptive at times, that high interaction, and that of course is great because that gets things going. I don’t know what else to say except that they were like the other three that I taught before. Essentially the same thing, same type of student, same background. (Interview #2)

Even with so many similarities, Joe did comment on two outstanding characteristics for this particular group.

The two main characteristics that Joe observed in this group were that they were very talkative and very cohesive. He felt that he was able to pick up so much information about the students "because they’re not quiet... if you don’t want them to talk, they’ll talk anyway" (Interview #2). Aside from being talkative, he also noticed that this group was very cohesive. As he explained, "Obviously the cohesion was built before I walked in there, so they all got along well with each other to the point that, like I said before, they had sub-groups somewhat, but the interaction was very tight" (Interview #2). Although Joe saw the strong cohesion in this group, he sensed that they were splintered into sub-groups because they lacked a leader. Unlike other groups that Joe has taught where, "they’re always very close knit and highly dependent upon each other and usually they’ve picked out a leader. This one as I indicated earlier was a
little bit leaderless" (Interview #2). It seemed, according to Joe, that the group tended to look to the one male student in the group for leadership, but since he wouldn’t take it, they were "kind of floundering, I think for a leader and so consequently they’ve sub-grouped quite a bit. Only that, I think, happened before I got there" (Interview #2). In general, Joe had a positive response to this group.

Joe also brought out an interesting observation about the territoriality that was occurring in this group with students sitting in the same place each class session. He saw it as "that’s our territoriality thing that they feel comfortable in the same place. I mean it establishes their position in the group. If they didn’t do it, then I’d sure say that there’s some cohesion troubles" (Interview #3).

Although Joe saw this as a normal phenomenon that occurred in all classrooms, he did see it as having an effect on the sub-groups that arose, and the effectiveness of these sub-groups in making class presentations and working together. He felt this was true especially in that class, because they had already established relationships with people that they’re closer to. And there seemed to be some really close relationships between some and others that weren’t. Of course, you would expect that, I think. Oh, especially when I let them break into their first group on who they wanted to be with, and then I observed that the sub-groups that they broke into, the three. The one group that took Buscaglia had obviously worked together before, and they were friends and everything, and they were really tight. The other two were a little bit more scattered, but not too bad. (Interview #3)
Joe was also able to pick out certain students that really stood out in his mind as either very bright or some that were having trouble. As he put it, "there are the usual several really sharp ones, and then some dullards, two or three of those" (Interview #2). He specifically pointed out Harriet as "going to be one of the bright ones I think" (Interview #2), and Evelyn as "one of the slow ones" (Interview #2). What was interesting about this observation was that the two students he named were very similar in background, up-bringing, and age, but were total opposites in their personality types. Each of these students is very bright, but Harriet is more traditional in her approach to learning, and Evelyn is more non-traditional. He also commented on one student that he found intriguing, because she didn’t fit with his original assessment of her.

At first, I thought she was really with it, and then I made a comment...something about people who had delusions, and I said, "Some of them get to thinking that they are a common religious figure." And I kept going, and pretty soon she held up her hand, and she said, "I didn’t understand common religious figure." I don’t know what to do with her. (Interview #2)

It was interesting to note that at the end of the course, the grades for the two students mentioned above as smart and dull reflected exactly this earlier prediction.

There were two key things that Joe felt were important to this class as well as to most of the classes he had taught. One was grades, and the other was the social aspect of the class. He was not sure that the students would see
these two things as important, but it was something that he noticed. As he observed,

> I'm sure they picked out different things. Put a grade on someone, and they're going to worry about that. OK, they also worried about what's going on socially, and how acceptable they're going to be with each other. And I think, they would probably worry about application of that topic. That would probably be third on their list...I think the grade and how they related to their classmates is always going to be there to some degree.
> (Interview #3)

In general, Joe really liked this class and thought that overall they were very bright and a delight to teach. Or as he pointed out, "Overall it was interesting, exciting, and I think that that class in particular as they came together was better than average" (Interview #2). In looking at the grades at the end of the course, Joe was very impressed with the group as a whole and felt that it was their overall high ability that made the class exciting. He also saw cohesion playing a part in their achievements, because "there wasn't much variance in it at all, which means that that's probably got a lot to do with the cohesion that's built in the class and how they help each other out with interacting and stuff" (Interview #3). Because this class was so cohesive and the students were more or less on the same level, Joe summed it up by saying "what that means to me is that A) they're easy to teach, and B) they're easy to evaluate, too. And so that made my job a lot easier" (Interview #3).
When Joe was asked what he thought the students' reaction to him was, as he had pointed out previously, some of the students in class would really like him and other students wouldn’t, and this class was no different. He also knew that "they as usual were threatened by me in the beginning" (Interview #2), but he did feel that their reaction to him changed as he got into the course. According to Joe, the students eventually warmed to him once he started telling jokes and sharing some of his experiences. "I think at first they were frightened, suspicious, as I've said. Now they’re looking at me as being knowledgeable and warm" (Interview #2). Although Joe would like to eliminate both of these initial reactions, he knew that no matter how hard he tried or what he did, that he would not be able to have 100 percent of the students like him and what he was teaching, nor would he be able to eliminate initially appearing threatening to the students. In fact, Joe had spent many years analyzing his own teaching to try to figure out why this was happening. One possible reason that he came up with was that, "I think maybe that it is, I come on too strong to start with. Like I’ll stand up and throw a bunch of questions at them and stuff. I shouldn’t do that I suppose" (Interview #2). Another possible reason was that "they don’t trust me just because I’m an instructor" (Interview #3). But in the end, Joe felt
that the students enjoyed having him as a teacher, because his evaluations were always very high.

When asked if he had noticed any change in the students during the course, the two areas that Joe observed where he thought this class had changed were in the cohesion of the group and their intellectual growth. In regard to the cohesion of the group, Joe saw that during the four weeks "the cohesion of that group got tighter. I think they grew to respect each other a little more especially as they saw each other perform those assignments" (Interview #3). Although Joe thought this group was very cohesive to begin with, it was interesting that Joe noted that the group became even more cohesive as they saw different aspects of their classmates.

The second area of growth that Joe observed was intellectually. This particular area was where Joe was hoping to see growth since he defined teaching and learning as encouraging change and growth. "Like I said before I saw some intellectual growth take place and that's what I was after. And I believe that that was significant in that group" (Interview #3). When asked to describe the kind of intellectual growth he observed, he explained that is was "more in-depth thinking. Better analysis of problems that are applications of what they were talking about" (Interview #3). I think this surprised him to an extent because he wasn't accustomed to seeing undergraduate students doing the
critical thinking that would be expected of graduate students. But as he said, "This group really wanted to learn something" (Interview #3).

Perception of Learning. As with any teacher, Joe had specific things that he hoped his students would gain from this class. The key thing that Joe was hoping for was to promote some kind of change in his students either as to their attitudes or as to their intellectual approach. More specifically, he wanted them to learn how relationships are built, what they can do to improve the ones they’re involved in, and also set some attitudes, like change can be made to a relationship, relationships can be developed in different ways, more relationships can be discovered and developed in concept. So that if they walk out of there with the idea that they’re armed with some methods for changing and developing a relationship then I’ve been ...that’s the major objective. (Interview #2)

Watching the students change and have the ability to take the methods he presented and apply them were exciting to Joe. This, to him, was the whole purpose of education.

Joe also felt that encouraging change in these students would be fairly easy and fun because "they expect some kind of change" (Interview #2). In addition to this expectation of change, he felt that the content area of interpersonal relationships was inherently interesting to students and as such made them interested in making changes. As he put it,

They really were attracted to it, because it gives them some explanation of what’s going on with your relationships, but more than that, that stuff’s inherently interesting. I mean anybody can teach that and make it interesting. It’s all about how
people are interacting, and how they build relationships, and so on. So I knew and it happened again that they reacted very favorably to the content. (Interview #2)

This general positive reaction to the content of the course made it easy according to Joe to promote change in his students.

The one area that Joe was hoping to change in his students was to improve their critical thinking skills. To him, this was an area that presented a great deal of frustration. Part of that frustration was due to the fact that at this stage in development, adults should have acquired some skill in looking at situations critically. But according to Joe, undergraduate students don’t know how to think theoretically because "they haven’t known how to learn that way, I don’t think, or somebody hasn’t taught them" (Interview #2). Joe didn’t feel he was very effective in teaching his students to be more analytical or critical in their thinking and was frustrated with this. As he expressed it,

No matter how many times I’ve cautioned them on whatever they’re doing, as far as their oral reports go, to try to get that into an analysis, they won’t do it. Some of them will, but they still don’t understand the difference between the two, and they will see how much they can cover without putting any depth to it. And so I will leap on them trying to teach them not to do that any more and then ...that’s when they’ll get angry. (Interview #2)

This was probably more frustrating to Joe because he truly had attempted to show the students how to analyze and had
encouraged their critical thinking. He pointed this out by saying,

I teach them to look for the reasons why a person would behave that way. Then extend the reasons into other motives, and I was doing that the other day by saying, "This is what's occurred. The depth in this was for other reasons. Now what else could that possibly mean?" And they start to catch on to that, and they start to think, "OK, to understand what's happening in a relationship then you have to understand the other person's motivation." And just asking the person directly about what their motivation is may not be where it is because they may not know themselves. So consequently we spend a lot of time working on that. (Interview #2)

Although Joe had expectations of changing these students in certain ways, he was not specific on what he felt they had actually learned. He did comment that because the students did so well on their classroom presentations and their final papers, he did feel that he had accomplished what he set out to do, and the students did change. He was very impressed with the feedback that students gave to each other's presentations and recognized that they were able to think more critically and analyze different situations. He was also impressed that "sure enough they did the same thing on those papers too. So I was pleased with their papers, the interactive learning that took place on the media presentation, and those are the two items" (Interview #3). He also felt that these students would also be able to apply this new style of learning wherever they go. If they continue in the ABS program, and that continues to happen to them, by the time they graduate they'll
be pretty, pretty nice. I shouldn’t say nice, but efficient learning machines. I think that’s what we’re trying to turn out, isn’t it? (Interview #3)

Personal Learning for Teacher. Joe was one of those teachers who was always analyzing his own teaching and trying to understand why students behaved the way they did. So even in this class he was able to reflect on what was happening and gain some new insights or reaffirm some of his previously held beliefs about teaching and learning. He seemed to be intrigued by a number of things that were happening in the classroom or that he had personally experienced.

The first insight that Joe shared with me was that he was more nervous about the actual physical surroundings in a classroom environment than the students. He said, "It took me a long time to figure out that that’s what was wrong. That it was the room and not the people" (Interview #1). He explained that over his years of teaching he had noticed that he was always very nervous about the first class meeting. It was almost like a fear of the unknown. By making sure that nothing would go wrong with the physical environment, he was then freed up to concentrate on his teaching. He related some pretty horrible experiences, like falling off the podium or breaking the zipper on his pants, that have contributed to this fear. But he had also found a way to resolve or alleviate this fear.

Stuff like that has happened, and that’s what scares me about it, and that’s what cures it. I
can walk in and say, "Now see. The chalk board's there, and you're not going to get hemmed in or whatever." And then I'll be all right. But it took the longest...it took years to determine why that frightened me. (Interview #1)

He was also sure that it occurred with other teachers as well. He mused,

And you know, I know I'm right about that, because I've talked to a lot of other people, and they'll open their mouths and say, "Well, that's why I'm scared some times and other times...it's not necessarily teaching. It's the physical environment." (Interview #1)

Since Joe had not taught in a hotel room for years where this class took place, the physical environment was definitely different than his previous experiences. He learned from that experience that "it had a little more class to it than the classroom. And it was really kind of nice. It was like...it was like going to a business conference or a convention as opposed to a regular classroom" (Interview #3). Once he had adjusted to this new environment, he seemed to really enjoy it.

The second thing that Joe mentioned was that in all the years that he had been teaching no one had asked him about his teaching. "You know in all the places that I have taught no one's ever been concerned about how I felt" (Interview #2), and Joe has been teaching for 30 years in a variety of settings. Even at NLU which prides itself on excellent teaching, he had not encountered a forum to discuss his teaching or share with other instructors. In fact,
the only time I do is when I go to those conferences that are designed just for teaching. They’re not a discipline. Like every January, I go to this one in Tampa called the Institute for Teaching Psychology and most of those people are community college people. But they’ll talk teaching with you. They really will. And for two or three days it’s kind of fun to kind of sit around and do that. And the one I went to in Washington this summer which was an off-shoot of that out of the American Psychological Society, it focused on teaching and there was some of that going on there. (Interview #2)

It was obvious that sharing his views and perceptions about his teaching was something that Joe found to be a very positive experience.

The third insight that Joe observed about the class was that this particular class didn’t seem concerned about what they had learned previously or what they were going to be learning in subsequent classes. He pointed out "that they don’t worry about the other teachers, and I don’t hear about the other content either" (Interview #2). His experience with on-campus, traditional students was quite the opposite, because they would complain about who they had last term and who they were planning to take. This was something that intrigued Joe, and he was trying to figure out why it occurred. In speculating about possible reasons, Joe suggested that maybe they were afraid to say anything because they thought the teachers in this program would talk to each other. He also thought that it might be that the students were just afraid to open up to him for some reason. Joe felt that
something's going on there. They've got to be afraid. See, the only other experience that I've had like that is when I taught for the military. ....I taught the class, and then at the break they wouldn't have anything to do with me at break. In fact, they would walk away. They wouldn't talk to me. I couldn't figure out what the hell's going on. And then I remembered, and I even asked one of them that these people are usually taught by superiors, and so they didn't interact with them socially. (Interview #2)

Another issue that arose was the idea of possession of the class. Since Joe was the third instructor that these students had had, and because I actually was in the classroom during the first night he taught these students, I was curious to see if my presence had any effect on him. He said that at first it did, but that after he realized that I would be leaving shortly that it didn't bother him. He was curious to know why teachers tended to be so possessive about their classes. He did offer a possible explanation, "I think it's ownership. We believe that since we're getting paid to do this, that those people belong to us. They are part of us. Realistically that's not the case at all" (Interview #3). So to Joe, teachers have a tendency to really identify with a group of students to the point of having a strong sense of ownership and feeling that their territory has been invaded if another teacher comes in. He was even interested in investigating whether this sense of ownership was felt by a number of teachers.

When Joe was asked if he would change anything about teaching this particular group, he pointed out that he would
have done two things differently.

Number one, I think I would have pushed them a little bit harder to better analysis of relationships, more in-depth analysis of relationships. The reason I didn’t is because I didn’t know exactly that I had that good of a group...toward the end. ...I would have brought in some case histories that had some real nasty problems and let them analyze these....and then maybe near the end teach them some more sophisticated analysis methods of social relationships. They may not have understood all of that or maybe not been able to apply it, but at least they could have touched on that. So that’s what I would have done differently. In general, I would’ve made the content heavier and I would’ve tried to challenge them more. (Interview #3)

The second thing that Joe pointed out was that

they reinforced the idea that I learned a long time ago that I have to stay on my toes with a group like that. And a couple of times things kind of got scattered in there, and that brought me back to reality that every group’s different, and I’ve got to stay flexible. That I usually learn unless it’s a group that isn’t very active at all, and then they never challenge me. (Interview #3)

In general, Joe expressed a strong sense of curiosity about what was happening in the learning situation and how the students were reacting. In general, he felt that it was a positive learning experience for him as well as the students. In fact, he stated that "if you asked me today to teach the same class again I’d do it, because I had a good time. I felt good about it" (Interview #3).

Combined Student/Teacher Meanings

Although this particular teacher seemed to be very different from the class he taught, both he and the students came up with similar perceptions of what occurred in class.
Similarities. The thing that had the most meaning for both the students and the teacher was the social aspect of learning. According to the teacher, grades and the opinion of the other students were the two most important things to these students. Based on the student comments, their interactions with their fellow students did lead to the most conflict yet support for their learning. Several of the students even identified that the input of other students was valuable to their learning. In regard to grades, this was actually the first time that a number of students had expressed a concern for grades where previously they had been more concerned for learning. So in both these respects, both teacher and students identified the same key things that were important to the students in this learning environment.

The teacher's and students' description of the class was very similar. In describing the group, the students and the teacher perceived this group as very cohesive. The students also continually talked about how they were coming together as a group. The teacher definitely picked up on this, and even saw the group becoming more cohesive during the duration of the course.

In regard to the teacher, both the teacher and the students perceived him in a similar fashion. The teacher kept commenting that he was an entertainer in the classroom and was more comfortable with the lecture method instead of
the more facilitative role of the cohort method. The students picked up on this and saw this teacher as an instructor, meaning that he was much more traditional in his approach than previous instructors had been.

Going along with this perception of the teacher as being more traditional in his approach was the idea that some of the students would like him and others wouldn’t. The students quickly identified that some of the students in class had been alienated by the teacher and were upset and angry with him. Although only three actually expressed a negative reaction to the teacher, the impression that the class as a whole had was that most of the students did not like the teacher. It seemed that those students who were more comfortable with a more traditional teacher liked the examples, presentations, and voice of this instructor. The other students who had begun to like the more non-traditional approach did not like this particular instructor. The teacher had actually predicted that some of the students would not like him, but he could not tell which ones. In both cases these perceptions matched each other.

For both the instructor and the students, the content was much less important than being able to apply the theories and concepts and analyze different situations. The students spent more time commenting on how pleased they were that they were able to apply their learning to their lives than they did explaining the concepts that they were
applying. They also recognized that one of the ways they had changed was to become more analytical about the communication that was occurring about them. The teacher also sensed these changes and identified them as the two most important things he had set out to teach. In this case, both students and teacher were focused more on the process of learning and the changes that entailed than the actual content or subject matter.

Differences. Although there were a number of similar perceptions, the differences between this teacher and the students were much greater than with the other instructor. The major difference that showed that this teacher and the students were often operating at cross purposes was in the way the students wanted to be treated. The teacher made an off-hand comment in his interview that the students would become efficient learning machines, and this set the tone for how he saw the students. To the teacher, the students were not really human beings, but were something to examine and study. The students reacted very negatively to this and wanted to be dealt with on a real, human level. As Evelyn put it they thought the instructor was "a voyeur of human behavior." It was also interesting to note that the teacher felt that the students saw him as warm and caring, but the students saw him as fake and not real with them.

Another related issue where the teacher and students' perceptions did not agree was on what was being communicated
about assignments and the grading system. The teacher felt that he had explained these clearly and given feedback that would help the students improve their next assignment, but the students were very confused and did not understand either the instructions for the assignment or the feedback. The one thing that was very upsetting to the students was the instructor’s grading system. The majority of the students in the class were familiar with percentages for grading where 90-100 is an A, and 80-90 is a B, etc. This instructor graded on a curve where the majority of the students would cluster around 50%. The fact that on this particular scale a 75 could be an A for this instructor was something that the students could not understand and consequently were constantly upset by their number grade even though their letter grade was what they had expected.

What the teacher and the students saw as important to student learning also differed. The teacher saw the other students and the grading system as important to the students, but the students spent so much time commenting and reacting to the teacher that it was obvious that the teacher had a profound impact on their learning. Many of the students focused most of their time and attention on the teacher and had some difficulty concentrating on the subject matter of the course. They were particularly upset by the fact that the course was about interpersonal relationships and being real with other people, and that their instructor
was a prime example of how not to deal interpersonally with other people. I think this dissonance was hard for the students to accommodate. Although there were a number of similar perceptions held by both teacher and students, the personal clash that arose between teacher and students seemed to have more of an effect on the students’ learning and held more meaning for them than any similarities that were noted.

**Multicultural Dimensions Course**

The Multicultural Dimensions Course was the fifth course in the sequence in this accelerated degree completion program, and was the last course analyzed for the purposes of this research endeavor. Following in the pattern of the previous courses, this course also dealt with relationships between human beings, but did so on a much larger scale. Where other courses focused specifically on individual and interpersonal or small group interactions, this course was looking at the larger concept of culture and its impact on behavior. Since culture is a very personal experience, it could be considered as similar in intent to the other two courses under investigation. The purpose of this course was to gain an understanding of the impact culture has on human behavior. The specific objectives of the course can be found in Appendix C.

**Student Perceptions/Meanings**

Since this was the fifth course in the sequence, the
students were very familiar with the non-traditional approach to learning and the modular format. They were also very familiar with the other students in the group because they had been together in these five courses for at least six months. Because the students had now had four different instructors including myself, it was difficult for them to refrain from comparing the different classes and bringing up issues that occurred in another class. They were also able to comment and reflect on the changes that they had noted in the group as a whole and individuals within that group. The same pattern of analysis was used in looking at what this course meant to the students and what specifically they remembered from the course. The student comments from the final interview revealed those things that stood out to them from this course, and these comments were grouped in the areas of course content or subject matter, the group relationships, individual or personal issues, the teacher, the learning context, learning, and change.

Content. Once again in the area of content very little was mentioned about the specific subject matter that was covered in the course. As in previous classes at least half of the class felt that the material that was covered was already familiar to them, but that they were now covering it more in-depth. Or as Jessica explained, "It wasn't like new information, I mean, like my first time hearing it. It was just I never, you know, looked and found out information
about it and stuff," and Virginia added, "Not that I didn't know a lot of that stuff, but I focused on it a little bit more...it made me more aware of it and how different we all are." The students listed different concepts that were brought up in class and different activities that they participated in. On a more reflective level there were some key concepts mainly involving an increased level of cultural awareness that were mentioned.

Although the topics that the students remembered covered a wide range, the key idea that most students mentioned about the course was that it dealt with understanding different cultures. Along with this key concept was the cultural simulation activity called Bafa Bafa which at least half of the class mentioned as being fun and worthwhile. Virginia commented,

At first I thought the game [Bafa Bafa] was childish and dumb, but as it turned out we did get some laughs out of it, in our group particularly. It was kind of neat to have that experience and the feel of that [being an outsider].

Richard also pointed out how much fun he had,

We did a little game [Bafa Bafa] that was very interesting, and it made it fun. It was really fun, because I was the head patriarch. I told the other patriarch under me to throw that person out. I mean you really got a sense of what the power and how you could abuse power, at least I did from my perspective. And then the person who got thrown out hadn’t any idea why. So, that was interesting. But then the person like me going in with all the power, I’m going in and visiting other places and trying to understand and try to follow the rules that were going on in there and that was off. I was completely out of it. A shock. So, that was an interesting exercise.
This cultural simulation provided the students with the experience of trying to fit into another culture. It definitely reinforced the idea of how different cultures can be, and aided in understanding how cultural assumptions from one culture may not apply in another. Or as Harriet, summed it up,

I liked the exercise (Bafa Bafa) that she did where she grouped us into Alpha’s and Beta’s...two different cultures...and then had us individually visit the opposite culture. Of course, we didn’t know what that culture was about. We could only roughly guess and of course that point was very well taken also. Unless you know the rules by which the other culture lives, you can’t really be part of it, and you can’t communicate with it.

Aside from the general concept of cultural differences and the Bafa Bafa simulation, other topics and activities were mentioned. Some of the other topics that surfaced were discrimination and sub-cultures, as well as biases, stereotypes and prejudices. The difference in verbal and non-verbal aspects of culture was also mentioned. Virginia pointed out, "I guess I paid more attention to words. You know when different cultures are talking and what that means to, you know, like Chinese and Japanese, the words and symbolic meanings. Whether it be non-verbal or verbal."

As expected in this particular group where there were a number of black as well as Jewish women, Jewish and black issues came up in class along with ethnocentricism and the recognition that there are different religions and different values in cultures. As Diane explained,
When you start talking about culture, a lot of people start bringing up the prejudices and the biases. And I didn't. I feel sometimes that Shirley feels like, because she keeps bringing up black issues, keeps bringing up black women, the black man is ignored, the black woman is ignored.

In addition to this wide variety of topics, the two other activities that left an impression on some of the students were sharing their cultural backgrounds or roots with the class and making presentations about other cultures. Overall, the things that students focused on or had meaning to them were those topics that either had personal interest for them or had involved them in some activity.

Aside from listing specific topics covered in this course, a few students commented that they were noticing an increase in cultural awareness. As Richard pointed out,

One of the things that our company talked about, we talked about changing the company culture and that culture meant the rules we used to go by. Written or unwritten [rules] were now changed to be this and some of the unwritten ones were now more or less if they’re not written down on like the Bill of Rights, they are spoken here. So, they become rules that you’re going to follow. So, that was interesting. I never thought of it quite like that. When you think of culture you think nationalities or something. And here you’re actually talking about the rules of a particular place. You even have a small mini-culture within your own house.

So an increased awareness in the importance of the unwritten rules of culture was an obvious content issue that arose. Amy realized that she had become more aware of the subcultures that exist in a dominant culture. Her perception was that "within white middle class people for example there are several other cultures. I mean mental illness alone is
a culture and within this culture are many subcultures."
Cultural awareness was also emphasized by a class assignment
interview a person from another culture. However, many of
the students chose to focus on their own culture. Phyllis,
in particular, was surprised that more people didn’t ask
about other cultures or try to learn more about other
cultures, but that they were more interested in their own.
As Phyllis recounted, when another student asked her,

"Why didn’t you do yours on your culture? I don’t know
anything about the black race." I said, "Well, Harriet, why didn’t you?" because the object of the
thing was to interview people. "You could’ve
interviewed me."...."why didn’t you interview me?"
Maybe it really wasn’t that important to you. But it
made me kind of like...I almost felt...maybe this is
arrogant or pompous, I almost felt like they weren’t
worthy of knowing. That’s how I felt. But when she
said...I said, "Harriet, you just ask. That was the
object of the whole thing to find out about another
culture. But you showed yours were you being selfish?"

In looking at the stated objectives of this course, it is
interesting that one student noticed how much others focused
on their own culture, instead of different cultures. If
this is truly the case for the rest of the class, then the
increase in awareness was limited to one’s own culture.

Aside from an increase in awareness about culture in
general, the students did not focus on the subject matter as
being an important part of their learning. When they did
mention an activity, it was usually something that they were
personally involved in and had personal meaning for them.
The fact that most of the concepts or content presented in
this class was material that was already familiar to the
students may have had an impact on why they did not find the subject matter of the course particularly meaningful.

Group Relationships. As with previous courses, the students looked at the group as a whole and also their individual part in the group. Their comments focused mainly on describing the characteristics of the group. A few of the students commented about how they fit into the group. It was interesting to note that unlike the other courses, quite a few of the students were now aware of and were analyzing more of the group’s behavior. For instance, Phyllis commented that,

A lot of people don’t care for Kathy which I don’t understand, but I don’t say anything. I just kind of listen and watch. Why don’t they care for her? There are people who don’t. They think she’s weird, and I’m trying to understand. ...What is it about her that they don’t like?

Or Amy mentioned that the group is "more interested in grades than really doing it, and doing it wrong than not doing it. Do you know what I mean? They’d rather not do it, than do it wrong and be criticized." Or Cindy summed it up with "even though it's kind of a fairly small bunch of people, people were starting to sense some of their layers too and you can really see where they’re coming from."

The students once again pointed out specific characteristics that they noticed about the group. In general, the described characteristics were once again how talkative the group was. Evelyn described this by saying, "You know our class is so enthusiastic about everything but
she [the teacher] had the same problem as everybody else in getting through what she had planned for the day, because everybody talks so much." They also mentioned how cohesive they had become in spite of their diversity. Students also commented on how comfortable they felt in sharing their opinions and feelings with the group, and they recognized that there was a high level of trust. Some of the students also felt that the group was very supportive of each other, and really listened to what others were saying and were accepting of others. In fact one student felt so comfortable with the group that she came out to the group that she was gay. To illustrate how supportive the group was, Harriet said, "I’m so proud of her. I’m sure it was really hard for her to do that." In general, this group seemed to really enjoy each other. As Phyllis summed it up,

I think what I’m saying is that I think all of them are neat. They have all their things about them that I like, and that at any time I would really want to hook up with them or something.

The few negative comments that were made about the group focused on a few individuals or the down side to being so talkative. The downside to being so talkative was that sometimes the group became unruly and could get out of control at which time people were not listened to because so many people were talking. Or as Cindy explained,

Some times there's three people in class, you know, tend to not...seem to talk quite a bit. And things can get out of hand pretty fast. And there have been times when you think, "Well, I think I only got three hours
out of this class because the rest of the time was lost in inane wanderings."

Amy felt that some of the students in class were not understanding the material, or as she put it,

Our class is very destructive as far as education goes. They get off the track, and Donna [the instructor] because she doesn’t know us very well had a very hard time getting us back on track. I mean that’s my observation. I could be wrong. We have Kathy who according to Cindy is from another planet. She just asks questions from like a week before or non-existent. And then we have Diane who doesn’t get it. You know what I’m talking about? We have Jessica who just.. I don’t know why she’s there, and then we have Mary Ann who wants the traditional classroom. It’s not what I’m used to and they’ll just come up with things that just have nothing to do with class.

Another student felt that a few students were not as open-minded as they had expected. Also on the negative side, one or two of the students didn’t feel like they fit in and were having to learn how to deal with the group. As Kathy described it,

I haven’t fit before all the time. I’m getting better. I think I’m better. It is important that they accept you even if you don’t want to admit it, you feel better if you’re accepted. They accept me now, I think, as much as I need to be accepted. I think they do. I’m okay.

Even with a few individual negative comments, the perception of the group as a whole was very positive, with people being very supportive and friendly to each other. It was interesting to note that the students, even after almost six months together, could still see this group as being very comfortable and accepting of each other.
In general, the reaction to the group’s behavior was much more analytical and reflective. Most of the students seemed to be much more aware of specific group interactions which they had not mentioned before. More students could also give insights into the behavior of specific individuals in the class with Kathy, in particular, being hard for the group to understand.

The following are some examples of the various insights the students had into both group and individual behaviors. Focusing on specific students, Cindy was convinced Kathy must be an alien because, "she’s just on such a different wave length than anybody I’ve ever met in my life. Poor Kathy, I’ll try to be more patient with her. She is so odd." Another student sensed that the black students in the group felt picked on and that the group should be more sensitive. In addition, Diane recognized that the way people described their learning revealed a lot about their personality, and she observed that,

it’s interesting the way that different people view what they’ve studied. I’ve found that it says a lot about the person themselves the way they describe what they’re learning....like Harriet and Evelyn [who are Jewish] even though they were talking religiously. I found that they were talking in those terms of feeding. They were talking about the foods, but not just the idea of the foods, but a hunger, a need, a feeding. Because they’re a people of no land.

Not only did students have insights into individual behaviors, but they also noticed some group behaviors as well. For example, Harriet pointed out that this group had
their own culture by saying that it’s a cohesive group. Of course, [that] makes it even more fascinating because you can really watch everyone. And the fact that it’s a small group, and it’s almost like a sorority, a club, a little club, a little culture of our own.

Although this group was very supportive of each other, Shirley realized that the trust they had built could be lost by misusing certain words, "Someone said the word, 'nigger' in class. And it wasn’t the first time it was said. I wondered if this person really knows by just saying this word that you lose a lot of trust." Overall these more reflective responses by more students suggested a growing sense of awareness that was not evident in previous courses.

The general impression that this group still had of itself was that they were very cohesive and talkative almost to a fault. They genuinely liked each other and wanted to hear what others in the group thought and felt, and most respected other students’ rights to express themselves, even though they might not agree. The students still felt accepted by the group, even Kathy, and were very positive toward the group as a whole.

Individual/Personal Issues. In this particular area, students focused mainly on themselves as people and gave insights into who they perceived themselves to be. They also speculated on how others saw them and how outside forces were impacting their learning. When students talked about personal issues, they often focused on things that
were not directly related to class. Often what occurred outside the classroom had more of an impact on the students' learning than some of the things that occurred in the classroom. Although comments in this area were mainly descriptive in nature, students were also revealing more insights about themselves and their wants and desires.

In offering descriptions of themselves, at least half of the students described themselves in much the same way as they had described the group as a whole. They saw themselves as caring, accepting, and giving individuals, who were adaptable and not prejudiced. A couple of the students also reinforced this concept of being accepting by adding that they saw people as individuals and valued the cultural differences. Diane and Virginia also focused on specific characteristics that they saw in themselves. On the one hand, Diane described herself as a person who tended to do two or three things at one time...You know, I realized another thing. It's that I function slowly. Not real slow, I mean, medium slowly. Like when I do my work at work and stuff. Everybody's like, "'Diane, hurry up. Do this. Diane, hurry." You know, hurry, or when we're doing this one thing whatever. And I, I said, "I am, I'm getting it done." I realize my pace, that's the word I want, my pace is slower than a lot of people when they're in a hurry. But I realized it's because my brain is so occupied, that there's not enough energy to move my body faster. I'm hurrying, but I'm hurrying, and I'm processing sixteen different things in my head at the same time that I'm just functioning along in my walking pace or whatever I'm doing.

On the other hand, Virginia described herself as liking order and being upset by the many side conversations in
class because she needed quiet and order, in order to learn.

She explained this with,

I go back to order a lot, because it really bugs me when everything gets real loud and people are having individual conversations. You can’t hear what’s going on with the rest of the group. I miss a lot that way in my learning. I get frustrated because they won’t shut up.

Mary Ann expressed a similar reaction with,

Donna wanted us to write these journals in class, and it was just pandemonium. Kathy and I could not concentrate at all on writing these journals with all of this talking and laughing going on around us. So, it’s just our particular learning style. I need quiet. When I’m studying for a test, I stop my clock from ticking. So to have this constant distraction is real difficult.

Since each of these students exhibited unique abilities and characteristics, it was difficult to find a common thread in their descriptions of themselves.

In looking at how they were doing in school, the students expressed a more confident outlook on their abilities. Finishing the program was now seen as a possibility, and grades seemed to be less important than they had been in the third course on Effective Interpersonal Relationships. As Amy explained, "You know, I don’t care about the grade. I would like to graduate from college, but it doesn’t matter if I graduate with C’s or A’s." And Cindy summed up with,

when we got our grades the other day, and I thought, you know, I’m going the next step with the grades and everything now. Because I wanted...I didn’t want it to be hard, but I wanted it to be where I was really learning something. And Diane’s always saying, "Well, I get straight A’s, and I get a 4.0"... and, um, you
know, that wasn’t that important to me. It was the experience of it. In getting from A to B, more than just being at A or B.

Even with this change in perception of grades, most of the students were getting A’s or B’s which may explain why their confidence in their abilities had increased, and they were more interested in learning for learning’s sake. A few of the students commented that they liked hearing new things about different cultures, and one student expressed some difficulty in adjusting to the different teachers that taught each course. The most common comment regarding school and which also reflected a positive view of their abilities was that at least half of the class wanted more substance to what they were learning. This came in the form of wanting more teacher input or preferring theory instead of case studies. As Amy said,

It’s frustrating for me because Donna knows so much about multicultures, and she only had so much time to share. I felt like I was paying for knowledge because I can get it out of the book, and I couldn’t get her knowledge. I couldn’t get her knowledge on black history. I couldn’t get her knowledge on these children who she’s teaching with learning difficulties who are coming out of the ghetto, who can’t learn because they don’t know how to learn. She touched on it. I wanted more!

It was interesting that these students wanted and welcomed more rigorous educational challenges. Cindy beautifully summed up this more confident outlook by saying that she was now being taken seriously as a person of consequence.

I’m learning how to talk to people. I’m learning how to be taken seriously. I’ve seen myself seriously and my immediate family and the people that I knew well and
were close to me took me seriously, but I never, um, presented myself to anybody else in a way that, you know, um, in a way, that I would be a person of consequence.

It was evident from the students' comments that their life outside the classroom did have an impact on their learning. Although there were some positive comments that possibilities at work were opening up because of what they were learning, most of the students found juggling school and their personal life to be difficult. Richard explained that he was having a hard time focusing on school because he was burned out, or as he described,

I was just inundated with going to school, going to school, and I did that for so long that I think I'm kind of like burned out. You know hitting the wall, as they say. I don't know if that's really true or not, although I am saying that I'm having a real hard time sometimes focusing on the projects and my reading. I'm not staying focused on it throughout. I'm going and doing what I have to do, but I'm not really, really going at it and staying with it.

Some students expressed that it was hard to handle both school and their job. One possible explanation for this was that these students for the most part tried very hard to put a lot of time and effort into their studies. On a more personal side, two or three of the students had major personal and family problems that were consuming an inordinate amount of time, and this made it difficult to focus on school. Amy probably described this best when she said,

The only reason I go to school is because they can't find me there. I don't carry a beeper. I don't carry a phone, and when I say to them I have my school work,
they respect it and give me the time to do it. Going to the health club is not a good excuse. Going out to lunch with my friends isn’t a good excuse. But they accept the fact that I can go to school, by their standards it’s okay....There’s only so much I can store...Whether I’m here and somebody’s pounding it into my head. I’m just here physically because I have to be here physically, but mentally I’m really not here. I hear them talking...I knew it was really interesting. I couldn’t get it. I tried and I couldn’t get it because I wasn’t thinking about what she was saying. I was thinking about what I had to do, and you can’t learn when you’re not ready. You know, you can’t just sit down and say "Oh, I’m going to learn this today." You have to make sure that there’s enough light, that there’s quiet, that you can concentrate, and that you can get something out of it. So, it’s really how you feel and if you’re ready to learn.

In general, the students expressed a personal desire to do well in school and that it was difficult to handle both their personal lives, their jobs, and their schoolwork.

The students seemed to be gaining insights into themselves and their wants and desires. They were also expressing an increase in their confidence and seemed to be more relaxed and accepting of who they are. For example, they were now definitely recognizing that learning was more valuable than the grades that they were receiving. They seemed to have less of a need to prove themselves. They liked being recognized for having the ability to formulate responses and analyze behavior, and they saw how what they were learning could be directly applied. In general, they were reflecting and noticing more in class and in their lives. For example, although Evelyn was against prejudice, she now recognized that she had stereotyped Joe, the second teacher, when she said,
I keep thinking that by this time you should have grown up enough to accept the things that are a little, that aren't really part of your personality, but I haven't. So I'm aware of it. I'm pretty much aware of my reactions, and I did have a very hard time with the one instructor, and that was Joe. I kept thinking to myself, "Is this a prejudice?" And I'd think, "Yes, it's a prejudice on my part." I immediately typed him, and I shouldn't do that. He seemed very much like a redneck to me, and I thought this is the one thing that I'm really prejudiced against. And so I talked to myself, and I thought, "You can't do this." My whole definition of fighting prejudice is that you have to get to know me before you can dislike me and I didn't do that.

A few students pointed out that they really had a lot inside that they didn't let out. In general, the students were feeling good about themselves and what they were learning. Their wants and desires centered around the idea that they were hungry for more information and more learning. Almost half of the students expressed a desire to be challenged more and to learn new things in-depth. Some of the other students felt that they should have brought up more of the issues that they really wanted to discuss. For Amy, she "would have liked to have shared that with our class, but there are too many issues - old people, young people, gay people. There's just not enough time to get all this out, to really make people aware of that." Kathy shared similar feelings when she said, "I can't go in there and say, feel sorry for myself because certain things aren't discussed. I have to figure out how to bring them up." Richard also expressed a desire to have more males in the class "just to share a male perspective of things besides my
own." All of these statements revealed a desire to gain more knowledge and a strong desire to learn.

Teacher. The students had a very enthusiastic response to this teacher. Of the three teachers in this study, this teacher was the one that was well liked and admired as being the best teacher they had had so far. Their comments ranged from descriptions of the teacher as a person, to comments on her teaching style, and then the group's reaction to her. Since the class had such a positive reaction to this teacher, even their negative comments were more along the lines of wishing that they had had more time with her or wanting to hear more about her own experiences from her cultural perspective.

In describing this teacher as a person, the class as a whole thought she was a great, wonderful, excellent teacher, who had the ability to relate well to all the students. Evelyn was particularly impressed that "she knew everybody's name right away and worked very hard at amplifying everything that was said, and I just thought she did a tremendous job with it." Physically, they described her as poised, confident and beautiful. Cindy probably summed it up best when she said,

And then Donna [the teacher]. The first night that I walked into class I thought, "Wow, look at this woman. She is great. She is beautiful. She is older than I am maybe. She has such poise and such confidence."

Her personal attributes were according to Kathy that "she was open, accepting, nice, and warm," as well as being
enthusiastic and animated. The students seemed to appreciate the fact that she was a good listener and was able to share her own experiences, and wasn't prejudiced. Intellectually, she was seen as thoughtful, very sharp and able to challenge the students. Virginia summed this up by saying,

I like Donna. I thought she was just excellent. She has, as I mentioned, I thought she was highly intelligent. She's very verbal. She has experience in her teaching that she brought to the classroom. Being black was not an obstacle to her to talk about any of the different things that we did get into. I thought she handled herself very well and very non-prejudicial. I liked her a lot.

As Virginia pointed out, the fact that this teacher was African American either had no effect on the students or they saw it as adding insights to the class. Or as Amy expressed it, "Donna touched on how bad it is to be black. I believed her, but I look at this beautiful, upscale woman, and I don't notice she's black." And Harriet added, "She did bring a great deal of her ethnic background into the class and pointed out several things that I had no knowledge of." Overall, the students saw this teacher as being very effective.

As far as her teaching, the students found this teacher to be very knowledgeable and able to control or at least direct the discussion and learning in class. The positive comments in this area ranged from the fact that she did her job and was well organized to that she gets people to think and is able to expand on students ideas. Along with being
very knowledgeable on this topic, the students felt that this teacher had a lot to share, but there wasn’t enough time. A few students felt that she had a lot of respect for the students and that she was learning along with the students. Richard summed it up with,

She was very knowledgeable, and, you know, I really believe that she tried to keep us focused pretty much. She really got us back on track, and I think the way that she handled it. You know, when there was side conversations going on or somebody was speaking out of turn, she had a gentle way of handling that. You know, a firm way of handling it, but also a respectful way of handling it, maybe more so than firm.

According to the students, if this teacher did not know the answer to a student’s question, she would find the answer and tell the student later. As Kathy commented, "Of course, she’s been trained to teach. You could sort of see her going through how to teach, and she had all the...Initially I noticed this, she used all the principles of teaching."

Not only did the students feel that this teacher had a great deal of respect for them, but they had a great deal of respect for her.

In general, the class reacted to this teacher very positively. They really liked and enjoyed her as a person and found her to be an excellent instructor. Cindy even saw her as a role model and wanted to emulate her wonderful qualities. She explained, "I know that it has been very difficult for her to get to where she is. But she has gotten there. And if she can do it and look good, and look great, why can’t I do it too?"
Context. After six months in the program and five different courses with four different instructors, the students were fairly well adjusted to the non-traditional approach to learning. There were still a couple of students who would have preferred a more traditional approach. I found out later that one of them, Mary Ann, was enrolled in traditional classes during the day and then taking this non-traditional approach at night. This transition between the two approaches to learning was difficult for her, and it actually took her until halfway through the program to recognize the value of the non-traditional approach. As Mary Ann explained,

While I was in this program at National, I was also taking the traditional classes. So, when you compare and contrast the two, I was finding it much easier to sit in a small class that was more controlled, then to shift to that in the evening with a terribly different age group. It was a big difference.

Aside from a couple of students, the majority of the students had a very positive reaction to the non-traditional format, and were surprised that they were learning because "it's fun" (Richard), and they weren't afraid of failing.

As Harriet explained,

Because of the way that I have been able to handle this, with a great deal of ease, it's just fit into my lifestyle, and it's a doable thing. It doesn't frighten me. The more structured classes I think would prevent me from going after a Master's, [because of a] fear of failure. That's straight out. Fear of failure. Fear that I wouldn't be able to do it.

The comments in this area mainly focused on those things that they did and did not like about the non-
traditional approach. The main thing that the students liked was the way the material was presented to them. They liked the use of hands-on activities, videos and class discussions. In addition, they liked the focus on independent study, on writing and on learning with no tests. Harriet expressed her appreciation for the non-traditional approach by saying,

There are no tests. The papers come easily to me. The class activities. It's like instant knowledge. It really is and so much of it I know. And I just don't have the buzz word, and I know it, but I didn't know I knew it kind of thing.

They also liked the student input and the seminar style seating arrangement that encouraged more participation. As Cindy said, "I like the seating arrangement. I like being able to see everyone." They even liked the sequence of the courses which seemed to make sense to them. Overall, they really appreciated the non-traditional approach to learning and found it fun.

On the negative side, some of the students felt that there was not enough time to cover all the material that they wanted to, and at times the speed at which they were covering material made it hard to keep up. A few individuals who were more traditionally oriented didn’t like meeting in a hotel because it wasn’t a "school". Cindy explained that, "I think what would improve the class is if we weren’t at the Hilton....I just guess it would feel more like school, if I was at a school and not at a hotel." Amy
felt that more emphasis should be placed on the text for the class. She observed that,

No one’s reading the book because in these classes no one relates to the book. And you get things from books, maybe not everything, but one or two things. Most of them just really don’t have time to do the papers and read or maybe they just don’t want to read it, because they’re not being tested on it. I mean I don’t read word for word, but I do read it. And maybe I don’t remember everything I read, but if I’m paying this kind of money there must be a reason the book was assigned and not just the work sheets. Well, I would like to see in this program, not for us, but for other classes coming through just a little "What did you get out of Chapter Seven?" or "How did you feel about this person who went to a foreign country and was on time and the people were never ready when he was ready and they weren’t in touch with their feelings?" That kind of thing.

A couple of the students who had difficulty writing expressed a dislike for all the writing that was required. Because this program focused heavily on group participation and learning from the experiences of others in the class, some of the students didn’t feel they were learning anything from the others in class. Amy was particularly frustrated by this,

I’m not learning from most of my classmates, and I think that’s part of the program too, that we share and we learn from one another. But if they don’t do the research, and they don’t do the hard work, then I’m being cheated from them.

As Cindy mentioned before, she thought that some of the discussions seemed to wander and not contribute to the course content. However, the students seemed to be more comfortable with this style of learning and were finding that learning could be fun. Even the negative comments
about the context were more individual idiosyncrasies instead of major issues that all of the students did not like. In general, the non-traditional approach appealed to most of the students.

Learning. When the students discussed learning, their comments seemed to fall into four general categories. These categories included: what the student had learned about themselves, what they had learned from this particular course, what they felt was most important to their learning, and finally, observations and insights into learning in general. It was in discussing learning that some of the students' greatest insights occurred as is revealed below.

The students generated a variety of viewpoints about their own learning. Some of them focused on specific skills that they had learned. For example, Cindy explained that she is

organizing thoughts and expressing them outwardly instead of just being satisfied with knowing the answer inside without it being available to other people. It's not much easier. I mean it's still very difficult for me to do that, but I am able to do it.

Amy found that they were learning to write in different styles, and that "there are different writing styles. When you write for psychology, and it's someone's idea, but it's not quoted exactly, you have to document it or it's plagiarizing." Another student was learning to really listen to and hear people. Other students commented on learning about how they learn. Amy commented that she was
learning about her own learning style,

I also noticed that my learning style isn’t because my mother said I was stupid or I wasn’t paying attention, but that I have to watch someone do something before I can do it. I can’t just read instructions. It doesn’t make me stupid, it just makes my learning style a little bit different. Like I can picture a dozen oranges, and someone takes away two oranges what they look like and then I get ten. However, I can’t picture 10 and taking away 2. It’s just like two abstracts and getting another abstract. So I learned that, while I was growing up, the way that they were teaching me might have been okay for most of the people in my class but not for me.

Other students found that their learning style was to absorb by watching and then analyzing. Knowledge and understanding of personality types was important to the learning of still other students. They were also learning that it was difficult to put into practice what they had learned. Again Amy pointed out,

Sometimes I’m able to use them, and other times I’m too close to a situation, and I can’t use them. Basically, the one most important thing is that not everyone thinks the same way I do. That’s very important. That was a very important thing to learn. Everyone’s perception of a situation is different. Personality types was very important.

Other comments ranged from a student who found that learning to work in a group was challenging to two students who found that they had learned a lot about themselves as it related to culture. In general, as students were exposed to the subject matter of this course, they were finding that they were learning a great deal about themselves in the process.

It is interesting that the things the students felt they learned from the course were different from what they
considered to be the course content or subject matter. Most of the comments in this area focused more on the student’s personal interactions and insights than on the material that was presented in the course. One perception that was mentioned by some students was the similarities between cultures. Harriet pointed this out when she said,

I found that I had more in common with her, that our similarities were greater than our differences, and I found that to be very interesting. I found that about a lot of cultures that we talked about, that even though all the cultures are very different, the similarities are greater. The family ties, the relationships, the respect, the authoritarian figures, the guidance, and all those things even though the cultures are different, those things are the same within the cultures.

Although some students came away with the perception that everyone is basically the same, most of the students recognized that people were different and that that difference was positive. Diane found that it "made me more aware of how different we all are. Just the fact that we [in the group] all came from such diverse backgrounds."

They learned to keep an open mind about people of different cultures and realized that it was up to the individual to increase their own cultural awareness. Phyllis agreed with a comment that Richard made in class regarding this.

Richard said something once. I remember him saying, "the bottom line is it’s up to each individual to find out about other people’s cultures, and if they really truly want to know then they will. It’s each individual’s responsibility." I agree.

This openness to others also allowed for some students to see and appreciate the layers and experiences that other
members of the class had. In general, they were learning more tolerance and understanding of behavior.

The specific learning that was identified ranged from learning about either the Jewish or black cultures to deep insights into culture in the broader sense. A few of the students learned the important cultural concept that culture is based on unwritten rules of behavior. Richard said,

One of the key things that’s very, very important in that class is that you realized that there were unwritten rules of behavior. I mean you may not have realized it in class, but you definitely realized it through your company that there were unwritten rules. People just sort of behaved in certain ways and nobody said why.

They also learned that language had many meanings and that often it was not what you said but how you said it that communicated so much. Virginia realized this when she said,

I guess I paid more attention to words. You know, when different cultures are talking and what that means to, you know, like Chinese or Japanese, the words and symbolic meanings. Whether it be non-verbal or verbal. That was kind of, not that I didn’t know a lot of that stuff, but a lot of it came. I focused on it a little bit more.

Overall the students seemed to be expressing a much deeper appreciation for culture and were recognizing the powerful impact that culture had on behavior.

Aside from learning about themselves and about culture, the students also commented on learning in general and what things were important to their learning. When asked what was most important to their learning, half of the students chose the teacher, while the rest seemed to be evenly
divided between themselves, the content and the other students.

The comments about the teacher’s influence on learning were intriguing. Some students, like Cindy, saw the teacher as a role model which enhanced their learning or provided a model for how to learn a particular subject, while others pointed out that the type of teacher had a strong impact on their learning. In general, the students felt that a warm or tough teacher tended to get the most out of students, but that a bad experience with or dislike for a teacher actually stopped learning. In a negative experience with a teacher, the student seemed to only remember the negative experience and not the content of the course. They also felt that different teaching styles had different effects on learning, and that the teacher was important to bringing out insights into the material. Diane probably summed this up best by saying,

It’s funny because the warmest and friendliest and inviting teachers that I have had have pulled excellent grades out of me. And the toughest, sternest teachers I’ve had have pulled good grades out of me. The mediocre ones have gotten mediocre work. The ones that some people like, some people don’t. You know, the ones that cause a lot of either, a lot of caring or a lot of animosity.... Because no two people are supposed to be alike in their thinking, so, I can just appreciate the difference and go on from that. So, and the, as far as like teachers, okay, for teachers, they bring their teaching methods each different to the class, and it’s going to affect each of the students differently. However they perceive the different personalities of the teacher and the teaching methods. And some will absorb better in one type of situation, and some will absorb better with another teacher.
But most importantly, the students felt that the teacher needed to be in touch with the students.

Not only did the teacher have an impact on learning, but the student as a learner was also perceived as important. When asked what was most important to her learning, Shirley responded with "Myself as a learner, without a doubt. What I might filter in and what I take back with me, I think about." Other students who felt the self was important to learning felt similarly that it was the interaction and reflection on the material that was important to learning. As Cindy explained, "In deciding what you want to get from the class, you can get a lot or you can get not very much, and I think we are all getting something different from it." Other students shared this feeling that it was up to the individual to learn. They also felt as Diane did, "that in order to really grow inside that you’ve got to, to put yourself into it, besides just being there."

Those students who chose content or subject matter as being the most important to learning pointed out that the material "has to be interesting" (Jessica) for them to learn it. Diane suggested that putting the content into a movie format would help her learn, and others pointed out that it was hard for them to learn things that were not interesting to them or that did not apply to their lives.
Other students felt that the other students in the class were important to their learning because they provided different perspectives that were valuable. However, although group interaction was seen as important, the group could have either a positive or negative influence on learning. In cases where the group went off on a tangent, students saw this as detrimental to their learning. When the other students brought in different perspectives, this was seen as an asset to their learning. Shirley felt that there was a key concept "for that class and a lot of people missed this. I wouldn't say a lot, a few missed it. And I think that when you miss something as important as that, you miss the message that the class was supposed to make."

Some of the students felt that a combination of factors were important. Cindy described this best by saying, "It would probably have to be a combination of the students, and the way the material is arranged, and the presentation of the material." Diane also felt this way and said, "You can't take out the...they're four pieces of the pie. You can't take out one and still have a whole." So for some students it was difficult to separate out one specific area, because they felt that the individual, the teacher, the content, and the group were all intertwined and important to learning.

In looking at what was important to their learning, the students also gave insights into what things contributed to
their success in school. When asked what they felt their success in school was based on, they came up with three key components. First, the student had to want to succeed in school. Second, the student needed family or outside support in order to succeed in school, and finally, the teacher as a role model of successful learning was needed for success in school. Cindy summed it up by saying,

I think just the fact that, one, that I have wanted to do this for so long and I just decided to do it, and I'm receiving so much support [from] my family, the assistant I work with, the doctors I work with, and the other people in the radiology department, and then Donna [the teacher].

From all of these comments on what was important to learning and what helped them succeed in school, I saw that what was really important to the student was the personal relationship that the student had in the classroom with the teacher, and the other students, more so than with the material.

There were many other insights that the students had into their learning. The comment that most of the students made was that they realized that life intervenes and can interfere with learning, as Amy and Richard alluded to earlier. They were also becoming more focused on the actual learning that had personal meaning for them, and were realizing that learning was more important than grades. Another example that students were taking their learning seriously was that they were beginning to realize not only the importance of learning to their own personal lives but
that learning never stopped and was truly life long. Or as Virginia described it, "Now, that to me is what it’s all about, you know. Not saying, 'Oh, I know everything. I’m 77, and I know everything.' Because I don’t think we ever do."

Change. The one area that showed some dramatic comments and results was in the area of change. Since this was the last course to be examined for this research, it was expected that the students would notice that they had changed over the course of the six months that they had been studying together. Students really did notice a change especially in themselves. They also noticed a change in the group as a whole, and some of the students also commented on some of the changes that they noticed in individual classmates.

The two key changes that the majority of the students noticed in themselves were an increase in self-confidence and a greater awareness of human behavior. The issue of self-confidence was explained and described in a variety of ways. As Cindy explained earlier, she felt that she was getting her own voice, that her thinking was clearer, and that she was more confident in expressing herself as a result of this experience. Kathy was becoming more self-confident by recognizing that everyone didn’t have to love her. Some people felt that they were becoming better, stronger people, and that they had a goal and purpose in
life. As Evelyn pointed out,

I think it’s a matter of finding my way in life right now, and I think when I came in I really didn’t know where I was in relation to other people. And I’m more relaxed about just being myself, wherever I fit is fine.

When the students commented on a greater awareness of human behavior, a lot of the comments focused on their own behavior. They recognized that they were becoming more tolerant and accepting of themselves and others, and that their thinking was becoming broader and more reflective, and that their horizons were expanding. Or as Diane put it, "Then as you go back to school you realize, 'Hey, look, I am looking at this differently,' which causes you to evaluate the fact that you are looking at everything differently."

In general, they were learning a lot and as a result becoming more self-confident and definitely more aware and reflective in their behavior and outlook on life.

Students also noticed a change in the group. Although this group was very cohesive to begin with, the students noticed that they had become even more comfortable with each other. They seemed to be getting stronger and their relationships with one another seemed to be getting deeper or as a few of the students pointed out they were becoming more of a group. To them, this meant having more trust, being more relaxed, and being more accepting and less judgmental. In general, there seemed to be a deeper
cohesion and greater appreciation for the others in the group.

Possibly most interesting was that students noticed changes in their fellow classmates. The two students who were perceived as having changed the most were Cindy and Jessica. Both of these students were seen as opening up more and sharing more with the group. In Cindy’s case, they recognized that she was truly blossoming and becoming more self-confident in the group. Diane saw that,

Cindy has come out of herself a lot. Now it might be just that her comfort level around us has increased; and so she, when she’s comfortable with somebody, she is less introverted. But remember at the beginning, she was saying how introverted she was. Well, I find her not to be very introverted any more.

Shirley saw a similar change in Cindy, and commented with,

Cindy has changed. Boy, has she come out of her shell. It’s like a metamorphosis here. Oh, my gosh! Not at all like the person I thought she...I always knew she was a very kind heart, but she also has a joking side to her that nobody knows about.

The other person who was mentioned at least by three people was Richard, the only male in the class. They recognized that he was being accepted more and that he was becoming more sensitive to the issues presented in class. He was also loosening up and seemed to like himself better. Diane again offered her opinion,

I felt a lot of people picked on Richard at first because he was the boy in the class, and the male opinion listener. But as they’re learning, he’s very sensitive to other people’s needs, especially sensitive to women.

The other students that were mentioned only briefly seemed
to be mellowing. Evelyn was described as being softer with more insights, while Virginia was not as angry, and Diane, the most talkative member, was becoming quieter. Cindy summed this up by saying,

Evelyn has changed. She’s a little softer than she was. Her remarks are very thoughtful and very well thought out before she says them, and they seem to...they have a lot of impact too. I don’t think Virginia’s quite as angry as she was at first.

Overall the sense that I got from these comments was that students were becoming more self-confident and as a result were relaxing and becoming more the people that they wanted to be.

Summary. Of the areas that were mentioned above, the ones that received the most attention were in learning and change. Once again the specific content or subject matter of the course seemed to hold less interest for the students, but in contrast what they personally got out of the course and what they were learning overall were very important to them. Since this was the fifth class, it would be expected that there would be fewer comments about the group and about themselves. What seemed to be more important were the changes that the students observed in both of these areas. The students’ general reaction to the teacher was very positive and received a number of comments. As stated previously, the students seemed to focus more on the personal relationship that they had with the teacher, the other students, and with what they were learning.
Teacher C Perceptions/Meanings

Description of Teacher. When first introduced to this third teacher, Donna, the students and I were impressed by her poise and self-confidence. Even the way she walked into a room with fluid, graceful, purposeful movements attested to her confidence level. She was very articulate with a well-modulated voice, and it was not surprising to learn that she had been an actress. Part of her self-assurance could have stemmed from her being a very capable African-American woman in her forties. She was also a single parent with two children in college. In addition, Donna was a strikingly attractive woman and coupled with her poise drew people's attention to her.

To Donna, learning and teaching have been strong elements that have run as a constant thread throughout her life. She explained that she always loved learning and came from a whole family of good students.

I've always liked school first of all, and I've always thought that learning was fun...I always had such a positive experience with it. I thought that everybody had a positive experience with it...and in my family everybody had positive experiences. We were all good students. All of us were very good in schools. (Interview #1)

It was just this love of learning and good teachers who "made learning fun" (Interview #1), that served as the impetus for Donna’s desire to become a teacher. She related a story about a particularly inspirational teacher who really had an impact on Donna’s decision to
become a teacher and who also served as a role model for excellent teaching. As Donna told it,

in high school one summer...I had this teacher. I can’t think of her name now, but I can see her face. She, kind of, was one of those 1930’s, ’40’s, people who was always pulling her hair back. But she...was just very graceful. But she made history so exciting....It was a six week or eight week session over the summer, and we were with her all the time. I guess you could look at it like prison, but I didn’t look at it that way. We were there from 8 to 12 every day, and so she...tried to think of all the ways that it could be exciting, and it was. We had music. We did shows from the era....the assignments were multidimensional. It wasn’t just academic stuff. There was music. There was poetry. There were readings. We would have dramatic interplays that we’d present as we were acting out Theodore Roosevelt doing something or the Cuban conflict or Hirsch or whatever. As we approached the ’40’s, what the music was like, what the people were like, what the history was like. So I just, you know, that just helped. So when I started, I think I was going into my senior year then, so when I graduated from high school and was thinking about what I might do, I thought about teaching history. (Interview #1)

From that dramatic experience where learning was so much fun, Donna decided to go into teaching. Right after high school, she pursued a Bachelor of Science in Education with a major in History and double minors in Political Science and Speech. She had just finished a Master of Arts in Education. Although her current job was working with mothers and pre-schoolers in the Even Start grant program through the school district, she still saw herself as an educator. It was just this love of learning that permeated her perceptions of what the role of a teacher was and her perception of her students.
Perception of the Teacher. Since Donna had always loved school and learning, most of her comments about the teaching/learning situation focused on the role of the teacher in general and her specific role in the classroom. It was very difficult to separate her general view of teaching from her specific role since she was constantly striving to be the best teacher she could be. Because she had just recently completed a Master of Arts in Education, it was also possible that her analysis of this role was more specific than the other two teachers because it was fresh on her mind. It was obvious that Donna had put a lot of thought into what good teaching was, and she recognized that teachers can have a very dramatic effect on the behavior of their students.

To Donna, the role of the teacher was an awesome responsibility and not something to be taken lightly. According to Donna, this responsibility involved three key elements. First, a teacher needed to make learning fun. Second, a teacher needed to believe in and value students, and third, a teacher needed to be a role model for how to go about learning. Although Donna recognized that a teacher did much more than this, these three areas were the guiding principles on which Donna focused her own teaching. Keeping these three things in mind, Donna felt that a teacher could have a profound impact on students.
To Donna, making learning fun meant approaching learning from a variety of angles, because "there are a variety of ways that people learn" (Interview #1). She talked of educating the whole person and integrating learning. To Donna that meant bringing to the classroom a variety of experiences similar to her summer school history teacher, or as Donna put it,

while there are intellectual and academic things, in order for you to be a whole person, you must have other things that you do. You should have physical things that you do, and you should also have art things that you do. And I think that all those make up a person. (Interview #1)

In order to accomplish this education of the whole person, Donna believed in individualizing instruction (Interview #1) and bringing in a wealth of information from books, articles and the media to enhance each individual student's learning. She also believed in the Socratic method as well as in hands-on activities or learning by doing, so the format of this program with a number of simulations and small group discussions fit her view of education very well.

Possibly the most important belief that Donna held about teaching was that teachers should believe in and value their students. As Donna vehemently put it, "I am very critical of all instructors who do not value their students" (Interview #3) To her,

everybody is valuable and if you get in front of someone, and you're supposed to be the instructor, then you have to know that. And you have to value that person's abilities and their gifts because at each age people have a gift and so...it's always a
reaffirmation that you’re a thinking, intelligent, and sensitive person. (Interview #3)

According to Donna, teachers should also believe in their students and recognize their potential. To accomplish this, Donna advocated honesty, and pointed out that students like honesty. They like bluntness when they know that you’re for them. You can say anything to them if it’s true and they will accept it. But they can tell when you’re not genuine. They can see through you very fast. (Interview #1)

The joy of teaching for Donna stemmed from the satisfaction she derived from watching her students grow and develop. Or as Donna stated, "I think that teaching is an opportunity to be a support system, be an aid to helping people reach all the different levels of their potential" (Interview #1). The excitement and joy of teaching for Donna was "to see them grow as human beings and to be a catalyst for that because you’re not really, I mean, it’s inside of them already but to show what’s there " (Interview #1).

Since encouraging growth in her students was important to Donna, it was easy to see that one way she accomplished this was by serving as a role-model for her students. Being a role model involved showing the students through her own behavior how to go about learning about a topic. One specific thing that she role modeled was to bring in articles or information from outside of class and the assigned readings and then integrate that into the class discussion. "Because you role model that behavior then they
will bring in readings and articles and they'll start to do that too" (Interview #3).

Besides role modeling behavior, Donna also felt that teachers should role model some of their beliefs about learning. As Donna explained the role of a teacher,

As an instructor besides being an actor and a politician and a, you know, a conflict resolution person, you also role model your beliefs in something that you think will be a positive learning experience for the people that you’re sitting in front of. (Interview #3)

Donna served as an excellent role model of a teacher who valued her students and saw learning as a fun way to grow.

Donna’s view of her own role as a teacher centered on her students. She saw herself as a cheerleader who was there to encourage her students to grow. She also respected and valued her students and their input into the learning process, and with this in mind she had adapted her style of teaching to incorporate student needs and wants. Overall Donna conveyed a sense of confidence in her ability to teach and reach students.

Donna was definitely confident in her teaching abilities. This was particularly evident when students tried to warn her that they were a class that at least one teacher could not handle. Donna’s reaction to this was "even though they had said these things about the other person, I wasn’t really worried about that because I knew that that wouldn’t happen in my class" (Interview #3). In fact, she was so confident in her abilities to handle the
class that she thought that "it's good that they have experiences with other people" (Interview #3), because that's the way the world is. She also explained that her confidence stemmed from the fact that she believed in not only herself, but what she was teaching and in the ability of her students. Or as she put it, "I knew that I believed in the material, I believed in the students, and I believed that between the three other situations, the students, the material, and myself, that we would have a good experience" (Interview #3). Aside from her confidence in her own abilities, it was evident that she believed in the ability of her students to grow and learn.

Donna had a strong belief that all her students could learn, which was why she saw herself as a cheerleader.

I can see the good in everybody, and I can see the things that they have to contribute, and I can also very honestly see those things that they need to work on, because I think that's also a part of growth. (Interview #1)

Her belief that all students could learn was substantiated by a new educational theory that she referred to which was contrary to the bell shaped curve. As she explained,

It's just called the "J" philosophy and it talks about everybody being able to learn, and I think that everyone is capable of learning, and I feel, I feel very good as a person who can be a catalyst for people to learn. (Interview #1)

This idea that she was a catalyst for learning and didn't just feed information to the students was an idea that she kept referring to throughout the interviews.
In order to get all of her students to learn, Donna employed a variety of different techniques. First of all, because she saw her students as individuals with a lot to contribute, she tried to individualize and personalize her teaching. "I just see them as people who are individuals with things to contribute that are unique to them" (Interview #1). She "tried to make it very personalized and very individualized for those people" (Interview #1). She did this by asking the students "What do you think that you'd like out of this class?" (Interview #3) Once they had expressed their desires, Donna tried to incorporate that into each class. When she couldn't, she would bring in specific information for individual students on topics that were of interest to them. As she said,

Because their thoughts and their wishes and their desires and things that they feel are important are worked into the class situations, and then that next week, I make notes, because a lot of times when I'm talking, I think, "Well, I have a good book on that. Oh, I have a movie on that too. I think I'll bring that next week." And I may bring in videos or, you know, or say, "No, I don't have this video. They have it at the library. This is where you go and find it or whatever." (Interview #3)

Another thing that Donna felt was important to getting her students to learn was to be honest with them. "You always have to be very honest with people. But you have to be honest where they are, in terms of their own growth" (Interview #1). She also felt that listening and relating to people helped in personalizing her instruction.
It helps you to really relate to the people that you're working with. So then of course, I strive to know more, so that I can do that. And then I also try to listen, because it's very important to listen to people in a variety of ways. Of course through the verbal things that they say, but their body language, and, you know, all the other kinds of things that are happening with them. So I'm trying to do that.

(Interview #1)

Finally, Donna recognized the value of learning along with the students and humor in teaching.

You just always want to know more. You want to read more, and you're never too old to learn. I mean, you have to always be open to learning, and learning from anyone. You can't be so pompous that you think that you're the last one on everything. And, of course, you have to have a sense of humor. You know, sometimes you have to laugh at things. (Interview #1)

One of Donna's goals in teaching was to make students more aware of the differences in others. She did this by challenging student viewpoints and showing them another point of view. She established ground rules for discussion that respected and allowed for other viewpoints. For example,

You know the ground rules are...you can say these things, but you're not allowed to hurt other people's feelings, and remember that there are other points of view...And then when other people didn't bring in the other point of view, whatever that other point of view was, it was my responsibility I felt to bring in that other point of view. (Interview #3)

Donna saw that her value in the classroom was to offer the students this different way of looking at things, especially in a class where the students had been together a long time and had gotten to know each other well. As she pointed out,
I see myself coming into that situation offering them something else, offering them, you know, another part, or another way of learning, and another approach toward their education from the perspective that I will bring, in terms of how I teach this class. (Interview #1)

She also saw herself as "just offering another dimension to them seeing another point of view the way I present it and the way it develops with all of us working together" (Interview #1).

This idea that viewpoints would change and learning would take place as a result of a group effort was another concept that Donna kept referring to. She saw herself as being part of the process of learning, and she was "looking forward to all of us being changed by it" (Interview #1).

When Donna was asked to describe how she went about teaching, she described herself as being very organized with "a lot more material than we’re going to cover" (Interview #2), and working from a plan. However, because she wanted it to be exciting for them, she was very flexible once the class actually started. As she explained,

I like to be really prepared because I think, I don’t like to waste anyone’s time. First of all, especially my own or anyone else’s, and I also like it to be exciting for them. Now I’d like it to be a really good experience and a really growth experience, and I’d like things to move. 

(Interview #1)

As an example of how much effort Donna put into preparing for class, she described what she did before the class began in the following way,

It’s important to be really familiar with the text, so even though I have taught the class
I before and read the material before, I still read over it and prepare myself, and I mentally go through. I write. I still do notes. I do it differently, I mean, I write out what I'm going to say and how the class is going to flow, even though things are written, because I like things to flow a certain way, because that's another way that I learn. I mean, I'm one of those visual learners, written, verbal people. So while I've read...so I do a couple of different things to get the material in my head. You know, I've read it, and then I will underline some things, and I will make notes of things that I want to do, and I know things will go, maybe they won't go that direction. It seems like with this group, that's a little talkative, that I still can bring in all those pertinent points and refer back to their readings and pull it in like that. (Interview #2)

Donna did recognize that even though she planned and planned, "you don't know what's going to happen once class starts" (Interview #1), and she saw it as her responsibility "to make the adjustment, to facilitate the discussion" (Interview #1).

Although Donna valued her students and saw her role as a catalyst for their learning, she was also always striving to do her best. As she explained,

I also wanted to be good for them. Because it's like a friend of mine said, you know each class is a one shot deal. That's it. You don't go back over that again. You don't see them tomorrow. You must present your best at all times. (Interview #3)

Because Donna believed that the teacher can make a difference, she felt that she "should go in and do the best that I can do and know that these people have a lot to offer, and value that, and sincerely value it" (Interview #3). But she also saw that although she was striving for perfection that she was only human and that it was all right
to admit to her students that she was human. As she observed,

I think a lot of people don't realize the value that you have as a person who can not always have the answers. But being...to be...to facilitate knowledge, to ask open ended questions, to use a Socratic method, to get people thinking about what they want to do, that's your job. (Interview #3)

Perception of Students. Donna perceived the students as unique individuals who had a lot to offer each other and herself in this teaching/learning environment. She was very hesitant to describe what she expected the students to be like because she knew that the dynamic between teacher and student would change whatever preconceived notion she might have of the students. Although she was the third instructor for this group and could have obtained a wide variety of information on the students from previous instructors, she was adamant about not wanting to know anything about the students until she walked into the room. She felt this way because she knew that the interaction between student and teacher would change depending upon the teacher. She had seen too many classes where the same students would act in totally different ways depending on which teacher they had. Overall, it was Donna's emphasis on the potential for growth and the uniqueness of her students that came through in her perceptions of these students.

When asked what she expected from adult students in general, Donna expected that adult students would be unique individuals who would have a lot to contribute based on
their experiences. She also expected them to be a cohesive group because they had been together for so long in the program. In addition, she expected them to want to succeed and to grow from this experience. Overall, she expected that the students would enjoy this particular course, and be enthusiastic about the program.

Donna expected her students to be very different from each other and have different needs and strengths and gifts. She also expected them to be what she called multi-dimensional. This meant that each student had talents outside the classroom as well as in and could utilize these to expand on their learning. According to Donna, being involved with not just the intellectual but with art and physical activity "helps them to think, because I think also that other stuff helps you to intellectualize and to get to your next level" (Interview #1). Since Donna saw all of her students as having multiple talents, it was easy for her to predict that these students would also be unique.

Another way that Donna perceived that these students would be unique was in the varied experiences that they would bring to the classroom. As adults, Donna expected that they would have a lot to contribute to this class since so much of the material focused on the student’s personal experience with culture. To Donna,

"...adults who have come back to school have so many experiences. And, I mean, that they are kind of like children, in that, in coming back to
school they are kind of diffident, you know they're not really confident. You know, ... they want to do well. Perhaps their experiences have not been the best. (Interview #1)

So for Donna, the experiences that adults brought to the classroom could be beneficial or detrimental to their learning. But Donna saw her task as getting the students to open up and see beyond their own way of viewing the world. "I just see them as people who are individuals with things to contribute that are unique to them" (Interview #1)

Donna also expected that the adult students had come to this program and this class for a particular reason and that they would be motivated to learn. As was previously mentioned, Donna saw the students as wanting to do well, and she also thought that "people will do well in this class" (Interview #1). Along with their desire to do well, she felt that they’re doing this for a reason. And the reason is pay or usually it’s money. Although somebody said ..money and getting a better job, according to people getting their GED, from this study done in Michigan or Wisconsin or some place, wasn’t the biggest carrot. But I hear conversations from the people who have been in the classes that I’ve been working with. It is that they understand that down the line they’re going to be accountable at one point for their education. Whether it’s for a promotion, I mean, they’re doing it for a reason. So I think that ... they know that the world changes and that they need to be ready for whatever is happening there. (Interview #1)

According to Donna being prepared for the challenges of the world truly did make adult learners more motivated to learn as much as they could.
Because the students had been together for four or five months, Donna expected the students to know each other pretty well by this time. "First of all, I think that it’s great that they’ll have some cohesiveness" (Interview #1). Her previous classes that had been further along in the program had known each other so well that they could now explain each other’s behavior to the teacher. Donna saw this as a positive element and also as a challenge for her as a teacher to bring in a different viewpoint.

They knew each other, and I would expect that will be good. And I think that that’s great for them to function like that as a support system for each other. I see myself coming into that situation offering them something else, offering them, you know, another part or another way of learning and another approach toward their education from the perspective that I will bring in terms of how I teach this class. (Interview #1)

Due to the nature of this course, Donna expected that students would be confronting some of their own prejudices and because of this it would be difficult for some students.

I think that it will open up people to a variety of things, and it will awaken a variety of things. And it will be some things that may be difficult for some people to deal with as individuals, and that’s probably... that’s an answer to another question, too, with adults. I think adults carry some, many, pre-judgmental things around with them, and these classes, and this course of study, unlike my undergraduate studies, are really devised to get people in touch with all those things which I think is very exciting. ...I think people will look at themselves, and they will come in contact with things that they didn’t know were there, whether it’s homophobia or women’s issues or special needs issues or homelessness or whatever. They’ll become...they’ll get in touch with that, and that there are some emotional ramifications for that. And then just being able
to deal with what those emotional implications are. (Interview #1)

So Donna’s expectation due to the course content was that these students would become emotional because they would be confronting issues that they have not been forced to look at before.

Finally, Donna expected the students to grow and see the world in a different way. She saw them moving from a less confident state with preconceived ideas to one where they were more open and really looking at their beliefs.

And my own experiences have been that people do change....and that they’re going to learn something that’s really going to be very difficult for them, but it’s going to enhance how they are. And that while I’ve taught this class before, each time I teach it, it will be a different experience and we will all grow from it. (Interview #1)

So not only would the students be changed by this experience but Donna expected that she would be changed by this experience as well. As Donna explained,

there will be a lot of growth.....I think they come with some kind of beliefs, and through the readings and the discussion and the contributions that their other classmates will make, will make them think about things. And hopefully, I’ll be provocative enough to also, you know, shake up some of the beliefs in that I can, you know, that I’ll be a part of that process. So I think that’s what, you know, I’m looking forward to that happening for all of us. And I’m also looking forward to all of us being changed by it. (Interview #1)

Although Donna initially did not want to describe her expectations of this particular class for fear of labelling them, she did point out some key assumptions that she had about adult learners in this particular course. Mainly, she

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saw each student as unique with the potential to grow. She also expected that the students were highly motivated and a cohesive group. But most importantly, she was curious about the relationship that she would develop with these students (Interview #1), and how that would change her as well. She also expected that she and her students would enjoy the experience together.

When Donna finally did meet these students, she found that some of her expectations about the uniqueness of the students, the cohesiveness of the group, and the potential for growth were true. The most outstanding characteristic that Donna noted immediately was that this group was very talkative (Interview #2). In fact, Donna noted that they "kind of take pride in thinking that they're very verbal, and they are" (Interview #2). She also noted that unlike other classes she had had that the students in this class were always ready and willing to discuss even to the point of carrying on side conversations about the material. Or as Donna put it,

when you've asked the question, an open ended question, you know you might need to wait, because I've had to wait sometimes to get an answer or call on someone. That never happens. Just hands shoot up and people start talking. Then there are like fifteen conversations on task around the room. They're not off task. I mean, they're talking about...it's like, can you wait so we can hear this? But they have some very strong opinions about everything so they're never off task. (Interview #2)

According to Donna, the students seemed to have a need to express themselves and share their experiences.
Another characteristic that Donna noted and predicted was that this group knew each other very well. She noticed that "they seem to know each other very well. They have a real good sense of each other" (Interview #2). She also found that they were comfortable about sharing some of their deep feelings and were very supportive of each other. "So I guess this is a good place for them that they feel confident in talking about some very personal things, because you know you do have to draw on personal in that" (Interview #2).

Donna was surprised at how very supportive they were when one of the students chose to reveal that she was a lesbian. As Donna explained, "she told the whole class the first night. And they were just wonderful. They were so supportive of her, and she is feeling very comfortable and feeling very accepted in the group the way she is" (Interview #2). As perceived by Donna, with such unique individuals in this group, this feeling of comfort and support helped them accept their differences.

Donna also appreciated their differences and their uniqueness. She pointed out that "they're such individuals and they have a lot to offer as individual people" (Interview #2). The fact that they were so talkative and accepting of each other contributed to Donna's perception of this group as being "very different from the other group" (Interview #3). Since Donna appreciated the differences and uniqueness of her students, it was not surprising that she
truly got to know and value each individual. "I would say that I really valued all of them because they were all very different" (Interview #3). One difference that Donna noticed was that she had to be very specific in giving directions because the class tended to get lost. As she said,

If I give like three or four directions they've lost it. I can't go back and come back. I have to be real clear. So I try to be real clear, you know, whenever I'm doing stuff, because then they'll just kind of get lost, but it's just always a learning experience for all of us. (Interview #2)

Another characteristic of this group that Donna noticed was their motivation and interest in learning. As Donna pointed out,

They're all so interested in learning and growing, and they don't have to be there. You know, they want to be, and that makes a difference. It really does make a difference. And they are really interested in doing the work. (Interview #2)

According to Donna, this interest in learning may have contributed to their talkativeness since they were all so eager to share (Interview #2). This interest in learning also helped the group be more open and accepting. Or as Donna observed, "it appears like they're very open people" (Interview #2). But overall, Donna thought that this was a great group of students, and she thoroughly enjoyed them, even with their talkativeness.

When Donna was asked what she thought the students' perception of her was, she had very little to say, other than the students seemed to have a positive reaction to her.
She also mentioned that because she was the fourth instructor that they had had so far that they would naturally compare her to other instructors that they had had. She saw this as normal since they’re adults...I think that they will always do comparisons because we’re all people. And people do compare. So I’m past that, I mean, if I can get past critics and reviews in the Sun-Times... No, I’ve never gotten any bad reviews, but I think that they will make comparisons. I don’t care. Because that’s what they should do. That’s a normal thing to do. (Interview #1)

In describing the positive reaction that she was getting from the students, Donna pointed out that the students were comfortable with her and seemed to be enjoying class so much that they didn’t want to leave (Interview #3). She described this behavior in a very interesting way by saying,

I think that they’re feeling comfortable with me... They’re being very respectful. And they’re coming in, and they’re starting, and they’re listening, so I would think that they’re listening to me. You know, they’re not doing something... they’re not falling asleep. (Interview #2)

But even in describing the class being so excited about what they were doing that they lost track of time, Donna always gave credit to the discussion and to the individual students. She never seemed to recognize that this could mean that the students were reacting to her positively. One of the few comments she made was that "I think that we’re doing well together. I think the chemistry is working" (Interview #2). Donna did however recognize that some of
the students did care about her, because they tried to warn her that they could get out of control and that another teacher could not control them at all.

Although the students had a positive reaction to Donna, this seemed to be of less importance to her personally. Her focus was more on being a good teacher and encouraging student learning than on what those students reaction to her personally were. It was almost although she saw herself as an interchangeable component in the teaching/learning process. Making learning fun and meaningful to the students, and letting them make decisions about their own learning were far more important to Donna than their reaction to her personally.

Watching the students change and grow was something that Donna took great delight in. To her, this was the essence of teaching and what made teaching so enjoyable for her. The changes that she observed in the students focused on behavior and on thinking. But to Donna it was the changes in student thinking that were the most rewarding.

The changes in student behavior that she observed had to do with the students recognizing that their talking didn’t have to mean that they were out of control and that they had moved to another level of intimacy in the group. Since this group initially prided itself on being able to take over a class and drive the instructor crazy, the change from that attitude to realizing that they could share their
ideas and still be under control was an important shift. As Donna observed,

that’s how I saw them change from realizing that they had taken pride in or maybe they were ashamed of, who knows, whatever the terminology is, of having really taken over another class. Because there’s fun, but there’s also some sadness in that because you don’t...you didn’t get everything. And understanding that they could be as talky as they wanted to in this class, but indeed everything that they said was relevant. It was valued, and it contributed to the on-going class work that was...that had been organized, so I think that that was a thing that I noticed...and also from their own experiences that they know that they...they...you can talk a lot and still not be out of control. (Interview #3)

Because this course really looked at people’s basic beliefs and involved a lot of sharing of very personal information, Donna noticed that this group even though they were very cohesive to begin with became even more aware of the other members of the group. To Donna,

they were just a great bunch of people, and they worked very well together, and I think they went to their next level of intimacy. Well, you know, with this kind of class, hey, there it comes out now. You’re going to get a level of intimacy. Because you’re saying things about yourself. (Interview #3)

So according to Donna, the behavior of this class changed in regard to realizing that they could be more controlled and could be more intimate with each other.

Although Donna observed a change in the students’ behavior, she was much more interested in the change in their attitudes and thinking. The reason that this change in thinking was more interesting for Donna was explained
when she said, "I would just like it to be the best learning experience that they could have. I mean that’s what my goal is becoming more aware and looking at people differently" (Interview #2). Because it was her goal for the students to become more aware, Donna was much more conscious of changes in student thinking. For example, Donna remembered that one student summed up the whole class beautifully when he said,

"But that’s not the point. The point is for us to just really become aware of the fact that there are so many different kinds of people and that we just need to be open to who these people are and what they do and not be very closed to it." (Interview #2)

And Donna could see this as well when she said, "I think that they’re aware now. I can see their opinions changing" (Interview #2). Donna’s technique for getting the students to be more aware and to change their thinking was to challenge them and their ideas.

I challenged other people, challenged things that they said, and they could see where it all fit in. So I think that was a change in thinking that they could see that what they said was valued, and they didn’t go overboard in saying things. (Interview #3)

So not only did Donna observe the students’ thinking changing in regard to the material that was presented but their thinking also changed in regard to themselves and the value of their ideas.

Perception of Learning. When Donna looked at what she expected the students to learn and what she felt they actually learned, her focus was more on the learning process and less on the actual content. Her whole goal in teaching
this course was not to convey specific content, but to have students become more culturally aware and to look at people differently. Since Donna saw learning as growth, her observations about student learning reflected this bias.

When considering what she wanted the students to learn in this course, it was obvious that Donna was more concerned about their growth as individuals than on any specific course content. She did mention that she expected the students to realize that learning was growth and was fun, and that they would be confronting some very emotional issues and would have to learn to deal with those. She also expected that the students would become more independent thinkers and would become more culturally aware and look at people differently.

Donna’s first expectation that students would grow involved the students on a personal level. She explained this by saying,

I think that learning, whatever direction that learning takes you in, really is a growth situation for people. And I think that it also empowers them regarding their person. I think knowledge is power. And I think knowledge is ... besides being power, it’s, also, I think it’s fun to know about things. (Interview #1)

So whatever new knowledge the student gained from this course would empower the students and contribute to their growth. Donna also realized that the students would be confronting some very powerful emotional issues that would also contribute to their growth as an individual. As Donna pointed out,
That's what will happen when we take this class. I think people will look at themselves and they will come in contact with things that they don’t know were there.... They’ll become...they’ll get in touch with that, and that there are some emotional ramifications for that. And then just being able to deal with what those emotional implications are (Interview #1), will help them grow as human beings. So Donna’s expectations of the students’ learning were that they would grow on a very personal level by being exposed to the content of the course.

Donna also expected that the students would change their thinking about other people and other cultures as a result of this class. As she noted, "there are some people who’ve never been stimulated to think like that. They’ve never been in a situation to think like that, and that’s always a challenge to get them thinking at this other level" (Interview #1). She also thought that this course "will open up people to a variety of things, and it will awaken a variety of things, and it will be some things that may be difficult for some people to deal with as individuals" (Interview #1). So Donna expected that students would be able to open themselves up to new ideas and to "becoming more aware and looking at people differently" (Interview #2). To Donna "that’s part of what the learning process is...is showing you what you have inside of you so you can be an independent thinker, and that you can be an independent person" (Interview #1). So Donna expected that students would be changed by the classroom experiences and
ideas that they would encounter in this course.

Not only did Donna expect that the students would grow and change as a result of this course, but she also observed that happening in the class. She definitely felt that students were getting a lot out of the class. "I think that they are getting a lot out of the class. I feel that they are, and they are thinking through the material which is the point, you know, to have fun and yet really think it through" (Interview #2). To Donna, being confronted with some of the readings and the class discussions also had an effect on how the students viewed the things that they had experienced. Or as she said, "so they’re reading the material, and I think that it makes them...I think that it just makes them think about all the things that have happened in their lives" (Interview #2). Since Donna saw her goal for this group as becoming more aware, she said "All I can really do is make people become aware of what’s there" (Interview #2). And as was mentioned earlier one of her students recognized this fact as well. So to Donna the students were actually learning what she intended for them to get out of the class which was an increased awareness.

Personal Learning for Teacher. Since Donna saw herself as constantly growing and changing, it was surprising that she did not have more comments about her own personal learning with this class. As Donna pointed out, "I always change, because it always makes me...each class has it’s own
personality, and I always realized that...there was something more that I should have done" (Interview #3). There were however, a few things that she did learn from teaching this group or that were reinforced from things that she had been aware of in the past.

First of all, Donna recognized that some of her own thinking about culture had changed as a result of teaching this class. Because each group focused on different aspects of culture and was more interested in certain things over others, Donna felt that she was learning along with the students and gaining new perspectives as well. In one particular instance, Donna saw that her own thinking about race and land ownership was changing as a result of the concepts brought out in this class. She explained this by saying,

I have to re-evaluate that. And I probably will say that that was land that my great-great-grandfather acquired. But then, of course, today I have to ask myself was that his land. You know, I will still tell the story, but the slant will be the native americans who don't believe that people own land. They believe that the land is the people's, and you go different places...so I would incorporate that too. See I had changes. (Interview #3)

Second, Donna found that with a highly verbal class like this that she needed to be even more flexible than she was already. Although she always had some key concepts that she intended to cover, Donna realized that she was covering fewer concepts in class but was covering them more in-depth. She described how she did this by explaining,
You have to have your agenda, and you have to know what you’re going to do for the night. But you also have to catch the moment of the class, especially with adult learners. And you have to learn how to make all of everything that you want to have happen that night happen, even if it doesn’t happen in sequence and not be ruffled by it. (Interview #3)

Since her main goal was for the students to become more culturally aware, she was still able to meet her goal even with a lot of verbal input from the students. She also realized that the side conversations that these students were having were directly related to the content that was being covered in class and that they were not being distracted by irrelevant conversations. This was a surprise for Donna, but she recognized that this was a characteristic of this particular class. Since Donna was one of those teachers who was aware of the teachable moment, this realization only reinforced her idea that teachers should be flexible enough to go with the flow.

Although Donna felt she had accomplished quite a bit with this group, she was still bothered by her inability to reach one particular student. As she pointed out "I think as a whole, I feel very successful except with Jessica" (Interview #3). Donna learned from her experience with Jessica that she needed to be more on top of those students who ask to miss part or all of certain class periods. To her, that would now be an indication that a student needed special attention. In Donna’s opinion,
Jessica kind of got lost...I was picking her up, and I thought that we had connected, and I...I don't feel so good about that...and I told her, I said, "You know, I really feel badly because I allowed you to do this. We did have ground rules, and you always seemed to have a good reason, but you're the one who's missed out in the end." She really knew it. (Interview #3)

In order to avoid this in the future, Donna decided that she would emphasize to the student the importance of attending each class. She proposed to do this by saying,

I would have been very clear about missing...the first time someone says they want to leave early, I just have to say, "OK, now, look. Let me tell you how this is. Now I'm not trying to make a big deal out of this, but my fear is that in these four weeks or five weeks is that you will get lost. I really don't want that to happen. Now you're doing that tonight so what assurances can we come to, because this is important." And I would do that. (Interview #3)

Donna did realize that Jessica needed a lot of attention and assistance. Even though Donna was planning to make changes in the future because she felt that she had lost Jessica, it was possible that Jessica needed far more attention than Donna was able to give in this classroom situation.

Since Donna had had a great deal of experience teaching all levels of students, the things that she learned from this class basically reinforced her previously held notions about education and learning. For example, as with any teaching experience, she felt that,

It just makes you better. It makes you value again people, and you just realize how all the different kinds of people think, and it just reinforces my belief...I feel about humanity, and, you know, caring for people. Because there's a lot of good people there, but you never really get
to see all of that. And some times the situation does allow you to see it. So I value them too. (Interview #3)

It was also very meaningful to Donna to hear "everybody's story and the fact that they were so comfortable with each other, they could tell each other to shut up and be quiet, and they could challenge each other which I thought was very good" (Interview #3). When finally asked what the most important thing about this class was, Donna did admit that it was

the fact that they bonded was very nice. See it's hard for me to say THE most important thing. Maybe from my own perspective it was that I was able to communicate with them, and they allowed me to do that so that we could get as far as we could get, and that we could go so much farther. And role modeling and listening. (Interview #3)

So for Donna the relationship that she established with these students, and the fact that they were able to communicate with one another were the things that made this experience of teaching this group so rewarding.

Combined Student/Teacher Meanings

This particular combination of students and teacher seemed to have more similarities in their perceptions of the class than previous combinations of students and teachers. This could be due to the fact that this particular teacher was very focused on the students and approached learning from the students' perspective.

Similarities. In looking at the similarities between teacher and students, both the teacher and the students
focused more on becoming more aware of other cultures than on the specific content or subject matter covered in the class. They were also both aware of the dynamics in the group and of how supportive the group was of each other. They also both recognized the changes that occurred in the students. Even their views of what the teacher meant to them coincided with what the teacher wanted the students' perception of her to be.

In regard to the content or subject matter of the course, both the teacher and the students did not comment on specific topics or concepts. If they did mention anything about the content it was to comment on some of the activities that they seemed to enjoy. Sharing their cultural backgrounds and making presentations about other cultures were two activities that both the teacher and the students commented on as positive experiences. Gaining a deeper awareness of culture was something that the teacher had specifically set out to do, and the students definitely mentioned that that was something where they noticed their awareness increasing. In general, neither the teacher nor the students mentioned the specific subject matter of this course.

In looking at group relationships, both the teacher and the students had similar views of the group as a whole. The group was identified as very talkative by both, and both saw how this could have a negative impact on the group. They
also both commented on how cohesive this group was. The teacher specifically noted that she was amazed at how cohesive they were and how they had moved to a different level of intimacy. The group was seen as being very comfortable with each other and very supportive of each other by both teacher and students. In general, both the students and the teacher were viewing the group relationships in general positive terms.

On a personal level, it was difficult to see where both the students and teacher shared similar views because of the great diversity among students. But one common insight that both the teacher and the students had into their own behavior was that the students seemed to have an increase in their confidence regarding school and seemed to be more relaxed in accepting who they were. Because the teacher believed in the students' ability to do good work, she also saw that as they progressed through this course that their confidence and comfort level in the information that they were sharing definitely increased. The teacher also saw the students as being unique individuals with a lot to share. This was revealed by the variety of the comments the students made about themselves.

The students' reaction to the teacher was very positive. Although the teacher sensed this reaction, she did not dwell on it. Because the teacher was trying to be genuine with the students and truly cared about them, the
students appreciated and were aware of this. The students saw the teacher as a good listener who was willing to share her own experiences and viewpoints with them. The teacher was actually striving to be a good listener and admitted to sharing her own experiences with the class because she recognized that she was a real human being. The teacher also saw her role in the class as directing the discussion and keeping the class on task, and the students perceived her this way as well. When a few students commented that they saw her as a role model, even this fit with what the teacher was attempting to get across to the students. Overall the students were able to identify all the same positive characteristics of the teacher that the teacher also saw as her strengths.

Regarding the context for learning, the students and the teacher seemed to view the non-traditional approach in a positive light. Since the teacher emphasized that learning should be fun and should tap into a student's multi-dimensional aspects, it was easy to see how the non-traditional approach with its small group discussions, and simulations would appeal to this teacher. The students by now were familiar with this approach to learning and also saw it in a positive light.

Since the learning that occurred was very individual, it was difficult to see where the teacher and the students perceived it similarly. However, there were two key areas
that they both saw as important. The first area that both the students and the teacher recognized was occurring was an increase in cultural awareness. The teacher explained that when the students were confronted with some difficult issues that challenged their basic beliefs, they were able to deal with that and become more aware of different cultures. The students also noticed that their sensitivity and awareness to different cultures was expanding.

The second area where both students and teacher agreed about their concept of learning was in the impact that teachers could have on student learning. The students saw that a positive relationship with a teacher had a positive influence on their learning while a negative experience had a negative impact. The teacher pointed this out as well, and added that those teachers who did not respect and value their students should not be teaching. So the relationship between teacher and student was important to both teacher and students.

In the area of change or learning, the teacher and the students identified some key areas where they agreed. The changes that the students noticed in themselves corresponded to the changes that the teacher observed. For the most part the students increased their level of self-confidence and also their level of awareness of human behavior. Both the teacher and the students also recognized a change in the group as a whole. They both saw the group becoming more
cohesive and more comfortable with each other or as the teacher explained they had reached a different level of intimacy.

Overall, it was amazing how similar this teacher’s view of what was happening in the classroom and with the students corresponded to the students’ view. One possible explanation would be that the teacher was definitely attuned to the students’ needs and as such was able to see the things in the classroom in a similar fashion as the students. Another possible explanation could be that both the students and the teacher had a great deal of affinity and genuine liking and respect for one another and this mutual admiration led to a common belief system. Or as the teacher pointed out, both the students and the teacher were constructing the learning that was taking place and as such they would have similar perceptions.

Differences. Very few differences between the teacher’s perception of what was occurring in the classroom and the students’ perceptions were noted. Most of the differences were individual in nature. For example, in examining the group relationship, the students picked up on deeper, more negative behaviors occurring with individual students while the teacher did not mention them. The students also pointed out specific personal issues that the teacher did not mention, and in the area of change, the students were able to identify changes in the other members.
of their class that the teacher did not mention. But these differences were based on the students having more knowledge about themselves and the other members of the class than the teacher could have possibly learned about them in only five weeks.

Global across Courses Perceptions/Meanings

After examining each of the courses on an individual basis, certain general trends across the courses seemed to appear. Although the students' reactions to each of the courses and to each individual instructor were different, there were some common qualities that students reiterated throughout all of the courses. The same was true for the three different teachers. Although each teacher had a unique and distinct philosophy of teaching, there were certain similarities that arose among these teachers. Instead of giving an in-depth analysis of the data, this section will take a more global perspective of the data to see which key elements arose from an across courses perspective.

Synthesis of Student Perceptions

In looking at the students' perceptions in a cumulative fashion, it became obvious that certain areas were more important than others. For example, the areas that received the most comments, and where students demonstrated the most insights into themselves and others, were in the group relationships, the individual/personal issues, the
relationship with the teacher, and the learning and change that occurred. The areas that showed a decided lack of input were the content or subject matter of the course, and the context.

Content

Overall the content or subject matter of these courses appeared to have little meaning for the students. The students explained that this was possibly due to the fact that the content or subject matter of the courses and the information presented were already very familiar to them. Indeed, the sense I got was that the subject matter of all of the courses dealt with things that the students had already learned from their own life experiences, but that now they were able to apply a label or term to what they had already learned or mastered. In general, the specific subject matter that was presented in these courses tended to reinforce the students' prior learning.

When students were specifically asked about the content of the course, they interpreted this term to mean subject matter, and as such they would list topics that they had covered or refer to specific classroom activities. In general, they did not seem to place much importance on the specific topics that were covered as evidenced by their brief or cursory mention of these areas. The specific classroom activities that were mentioned seemed to be more important for the impact that they had on the individual
student. For example, if an activity involved a presentation and the student had been uncomfortable with that activity, then the student would focus on that activity. Or if there was a concept that was either personally relevant or caused a group reaction, then that concept or topic was mentioned. Since very little was mentioned about the specific course content as listed in the course objectives, and the comments that were made were recitative and perfunctory in nature, it appeared that the course objectives did not serve as focal points for the students.

Without citing specific content areas, some of the students recognized that much of the content was familiar information and as such did not supply them with new information or learning. However, the students were able to see how particular course concepts could actually apply in their daily lives and these held much more meaning and importance for them. As the courses progressed the students also realized that they were becoming more aware of human behavior and that they may have been re-learning old concepts but were perceiving or describing them differently. However, based on their comments, students did not pay much attention to the specific formal content of the courses.

Group Relationships

Group relationships was an area of concern for all of the students. They focused on the characteristics of the
group, but more importantly they were concerned about how they and other group members fit into this group. It was the impact of the group on the individual that brought out the most comments in this area. Overall, throughout the three courses the general reaction to the group was very positive. People genuinely liked being with and learning with this group of individuals.

To begin with, the students tended to agree in their description of this group. They pointed out repeatedly how talkative the group was. For some this was definitely a positive, but for others it tended to confuse and disrupt some of their learning. The students also characterized themselves as being very cohesive throughout the three courses in question. Students variously explained how comfortable and accepted they felt in this group, and how close they were becoming as a group. Students also felt very supported by the group as a whole, and as the courses progressed, the students began to realize that there was also a high level of trust. A few students even expressed a desire to help or protect their classmates. One particular student did not feel particularly a part of this group, but even she described the group as generally cohesive with people she liked. The students seemed to appreciate the diversity of backgrounds, experiences and opinions that the group brought to the learning situation.
As students reflected on their individual roles in the group and on how the group as a whole reacted to individual group members, a number of students mentioned that they were learning a lot from each other. The general perception was that the group as a whole was definitely contributing to their individual learning in each of the courses due to the diverse backgrounds and the willingness to share experiences. As the courses progressed and the students got to know each other better, more reflective comments were made. In addition, more attempts to analyze specific behaviors by different group members, and to speculate on possible motives for that behavior, were made.

Throughout the courses, students were also concerned about how they fit into the group. Most of the students felt very accepted and comfortable with the group, but one student in particular felt that she didn’t fit in. The rest of the group recognized this as well. This particular student seemed to struggle with this issue for a considerable period of time. By the time of the final course under study, however, she had come to terms with the fact that she did not fit in as well as others but that she was relating to the group in her own way and did not need their acceptance. The group also seemed to grow in their tolerance for this individual, and seemed to either leave her alone or accept that that was the way she was. As the courses progressed, students noted more underlying issues
that caused tension within the group, such as racial or
gender issues, but these seemed to be issues that people
tended to avoid in order to maintain the harmony of the
group.

Overall, the group seemed to be very important to the
students and to their learning. As a group, they were very
cohesive and appreciated each other’s unique view of the
world. They felt very positive toward the group, and each
had found a way to relate to the group as a whole in such a
way that each student was comfortable expressing his/her
opinions in the group.

**Individual/Personal Issues**

Another area that appeared to hold a great deal of
importance for these students was the area of
individual/personal issues. The students over the three
courses seemed to derive a great deal of personal meaning
from their learning in this program. This was also an area
that was difficult to analyze because of the very personal/
individual nature of the comments.

In general, the comments tended to fall into four main
categories. The first category focused on the students’
perception of their own learning and education. Second, the
students were also very concerned about the relationships
that they had with the group as a whole and with the
teacher. Third, the students seemed to comment on
themselves as individuals. And finally, the students
realized the impact that their life outside the classroom was having on their learning. Of all of these categories, the one that seemed most important to the students was the relationship they had with the other people going through this experience with them which included both the teacher and the other students. Overall, the students saw this program and what they were learning as a very valuable experience to them personally.

The students’ perception of their education seemed to change over the three courses. Initially, students explained their reasons for being in the program with half of the students seeing the program as a means to an end and the other half seeing it as an end in itself. Of great importance to this group was their desire to learn and grow through their education. As the courses progressed the students became more involved in the courses and wanted to learn more. They seemed to want more rigorous course content or more depth to the subject matter. In addition, they seemed to be frustrated that very interesting topics were covered so quickly. At certain points this eagerness to learn more was coupled with a strong desire to just be finished with a particular course. However, in the final analysis, the students really wanted to grow and learn as much as they possibly could through their educational experience.
In the area of developing relationships, the students recognized the value of their relationship to the group and to the teacher. In the first course where the content was on group dynamics, the students were gaining insights into their own behavior and the behavior of others. They seemed to recognize the importance of their relationship to the group and how this relationship could also be important to their learning. As the courses progressed, the students tended to become more critical of others in the group, and were finding their individual or personal relationship to the group frustrating. As the students became more aware of human behavior, they did tend to value the input of different opinions and viewpoints that the other students and the teacher brought to class.

The comments that the students made about themselves often focused on their perception of themselves and also on how that perception was changing as a result of this program. In the beginning, the students expressed a desire to learn more about themselves. They saw going back to school as an opportunity to grow and change. As the courses progressed, the students began to see that they were changing and growing. At times this led to a certain amount of dissatisfaction with themselves, where they were more concerned about their performance in particular courses as opposed to focusing on growth and learning. They also seemed to be more critical of their own behavior. This
critical view did seem to help students more clearly see who they were as people and to recognize and value their strengths. They seemed pleased that they were gaining new insights into who they were. Their level of self-confidence also tended to increase as the courses progressed. The realization that they were growing intellectually was important to them, and they were becoming more confident about their academic abilities. Overall, the students seemed to be learning more about who they were as individuals and valuing the changes and growth that were occurring.

The impact that the lives of the students outside of class had on their experience in the classroom seemed to become more important as the courses progressed. Initially, some of the students did mention some of what was happening in their lives, but they did not focus on how that impacted what was happening in the classroom. By the final course, a number of students were commenting on their life outside the classroom. Some of the students were having positive job and family experiences as a result of their studies. However, most of the students were expressing concerns about how their personal life was interfering with their ability to do consistently good work in school. Some of the students were having major family problems that were detracting from the amount of time that they could devote to their studies. Although the students recognized the value
of their education, as the series of courses progressed they were finding it difficult to balance school with the rest of their lives.

Over the series of courses, the students' individual views of themselves as people changed, and their views of their education changed as well. Although each student was very different, they all began to truly value their education, and themselves, as well as the other participants in this educational endeavor.

Teacher

Since all of the teachers were very different from each other, it was difficult to generalize the students' responses to them. The students' comments about the teachers tended to fall into three categories. One dealt with the students' reactions to the teacher as a person. Another focused on the students' reactions to the teacher's teaching style. And, finally, the students gave their insights into their own and other students' personal reactions to each teacher. From the comments that the students made about each of the teachers, it was interesting to see how different their individual reactions were. Although in general the reaction to all of the teachers was positive, and for the most part respectful, each individual teacher seemed to evoke a different response from the group and appeared to have either a positive or negative impact on the students' learning.
In looking at a teacher’s personal qualities, the students seemed to generally like all the instructors. The first and the last teachers were particularly well liked by all the students, while the middle teacher tended to polarize the group with those who really liked him and those who didn’t. The personal qualities that the students noticed about the first and the third teachers, Kate and Donna, were similar in nature. In regard to Kate and Donna, the students found them to be pleasant, accepting and very approachable. They were also described as exuding self-confidence, being physically attractive, and appearing to be very professional and knowledgeable. In addition, Kate and Donna were seen as enthusiastic and animated. In general, Kate and Donna were both seen as very competent teachers. When students described the middle teacher, Joe, their comments on his personal qualities focused more on his intellectual abilities than on him as a person. The students found him to be motivational, knowledgeable, and articulate. Interestingly, they also saw him as a competent teacher. However, although the students generally liked all the teachers and respected them as teachers, Donna was the one teacher that students reacted to most enthusiastically and seemed to develop a very strong relationship with her.

In regard to teaching style, each of the teachers was seen as having a different style. The first teacher, Kate, was described as a facilitator. The middle teacher, Joe,
was seen as a teacher/motivational speaker, and the final teacher, Donna, was seen as someone who directed the class but valued a lot of student input. The students' reaction to Kate, the facilitator, was almost as though she wasn’t there. In fact of all the teachers, Kate received the fewest comments from the students. In contrast to Kate, Joe, the second teacher, had the most student reaction. Those students who felt more comfortable with a traditional teacher really liked him because of his dynamic speaking ability. In other words, they were captivated by his lectures. However, those students who wanted more student input into the class felt ignored and put down by this teacher. In a few cases, this negative reaction to the teacher seemed to interfere with the student’s learning. The final teacher, Donna, got a very enthusiastic reaction from the class. The students came away feeling listened to and respected, and they felt that she was learning along with them. It was interesting to see that the students perceived that they learned the most from Donna, while Kate seemed to have a neutral effect on their learning, and Joe had either a positive or negative effect on the students’ learning depending upon whether the student liked him or his style of teaching or not.

The students’ overall reactions to the teachers seemed to depend on the type of relationship that they were able to develop with the teachers. When the students felt like the
teacher was someone that they would actually like as their friend, then they had a positive reaction to the teacher. The students seemed to become more involved with these teachers, and appreciated them revealing or sharing their own experiences with the students. When the students were not able to establish a close relationship with the teacher, as in the case of Joe, the tendency was for the students to have a more negative reaction to the teacher. Even when Joe attempted to describe some of his experiences to the class as examples of human behavior, the students did not interpret these experiences as truly sharing. It seemed that the student reaction to the teacher was closely related to the relationship that was established or perceived to be established with that teacher.

Context

Since the context for this program of study was unlike previous learning environments that the students had experienced, it took the students awhile to adjust to not only the physical environment but the general educational context as well. In the beginning, it seemed that the students were a little uncomfortable with both the setting and the non-traditional approach to learning. For the most part the students seemed to like the approach where most of their classroom learning involved group discussions, simulations, and role plays. They all appreciated the fact that there were no tests in the program, but some were
concerned about the tremendous amount of writing and reading required.

As the program progressed and the students became more familiar with the expectations and the situation, the response to the non-traditional approach to learning was very positive. Some students even commented that they couldn’t believe that learning could be so enjoyable. The students also felt that the freedom this approach allowed them in expressing their viewpoints provided a more thorough understanding of the concepts presented than a more traditional approach.

Learning

Although the general expectation with any course of study is that students will increase their knowledge and learning in a particular content area, the comments that students made were more focused on learning in general. These comments fell into four categories. First of all, the students gained insights into the process of learning. Second, they seemed to be learning about themselves. Third, in addition to learning about themselves, they seemed to be learning about other students in the class. Finally and most importantly, they seemed to be learning how to apply what they had learned from class to their everyday lives.

The insights that the students gained about learning in general seemed to deepen as the program progressed. Initially, the students expressed an appreciation for
learning in a non-traditional approach. They also recognized the value of the group as a means of learning with its focus on sharing different viewpoints. They were surprised that learning could be fun, and appreciated the fact that they were learning how to learn, and that they were being given a method on how to think about things. Some of the students even expressed an appreciation for the use of journals as a way of distilling their thinking on a particular topic.

Because they were becoming more reflective about learning, they shared some valuable insights about what things really had an impact on their learning. The four areas that students perceived as important to their learning were; the teacher, the other students, themselves, and the content. Most of the students felt that it was the relationship with the teacher that had the most impact on their learning with a positive relationship with a teacher having a positive impact, and a negative relationship with a teacher having the opposite effect. Another important aspect of learning was the other students in class. The students perceived that their classmates provided valuable insights that an individual student could not gain otherwise. In addition to seeing the contributions that were made by the teacher and their classmates, some of the students felt that they themselves were important to learning. In other words, without the motivation to learn
and the ability to relate to what they were learning in a meaningful way, they as individual learners would not be able to learn. In regard to content or subject matter, the students expressed the importance of what was covered in class being interesting or relevant. In general, the key idea that the students expressed was that for learning to be successful the student needs a relationship with the teacher, their classmates, and the material that was being presented. According to these students, it appeared that without meaningful relationships in these four areas learning would be adversely affected.

Learning about themselves and recognizing the various learning skills that they were developing seemed to be very important to these students. Initially, students noticed that they were learning how to learn. They sensed that they were developing skills of analysis and becoming more aware of human behavior which in turn was building their confidence as learners. Along with this increase in awareness, students were also seeing that they were becoming more tolerant of differences in others and were more open to other viewpoints because of the new understanding that they had gained.

Another important aspect of learning to these students was the interaction with the group. The students seemed to recognize and value the learning that they were gaining from their classmates. Most of the students expressed
appreciation for the diverse viewpoints of their classmates. They also felt that they were learning more about human behavior and its motivations and ways to deal with it by observing the interactions that took place in class. Although the students saw the impact that their classmates had on their learning, this impact could be either positive or negative. An example of this was that other students could dominate classroom interactions and thus potentially hinder other students’ learning. As the program progressed the students were also applying some of the concepts that they had learned in the courses to understand their classmates better.

The area that, perhaps most surprisingly, seemed to be most important to the students was that they were able to apply the things that they were learning in class to their lives. For some of the students, what they were learning could be applied to their work situations, and they could see positive results from these applications. Other students were trying to apply their learning to a personal, family situation. For some, this too showed positive results. If the students were not able to directly apply a theory or concept that they had learned from class, they could still see how they might apply it in the future, or they recognized that their increased level of awareness and tolerance of human behavior was also valuable outside of class. Not only were the students increasing their level of
awareness of human behavior in general, but they were also becoming more aware of and more reflective about their own learning and what could affect it.

**Change**

Since some adult education theorists, such as Mezirow (1991), see education as transformative, it seemed important to see how the students felt they had changed over the course of this study. The changes that the students noticed fell into three general categories: changes in themselves, changes in the group as a whole, and also changes in other individual classmates. The two major changes that seemed to occur were in developing a greater awareness of human behavior and an increase in self-confidence.

In looking at their own individual changes, the students became more reflective as the program progressed. Initially, the major change that students perceived was an increase in awareness and understanding. They seemed genuinely delighted that they were now seeing the world differently. As the courses progressed, the students saw more specific personal growth, such as improved communication, or challenging themselves to do something unfamiliar. They found that they were better able to observe and analyze human behavior and not be as judgmental about it. All of this perceived growth also led them to see themselves as more confident and competent and able to understand themselves better.
As a group, the change that was noted the most was that they had become an even more cohesive group. As they learned more about each other, there seemed to be an increased appreciation for the other members of the group, and they sensed that they as a group were becoming closer. They also perceived the group as becoming even more accepting and more open to the other members of the group. The major change here was the sense that the initial close relationship that this group had established from the beginning was deepening.

In considering specific members of the group where change was noticed most, the major change that was noticed was an increase in confidence or becoming more open and accepting. The specific students who were mentioned as changing the most were Richard, Jessica, and Cindy. Of those students, Jessica and Cindy seemed to be contributing more and seemed to have increased self-confidence. Since the only male, Richard, was in a unique position, the group saw him as loosening up and really becoming more accepted by the group. Other individual students who were mentioned were cited for their mellowing or calming down or for being more accepting. Specific students in the group, then, were seen as changing to becoming more genuine in who they were.

**Synthesis of Teacher Perceptions**

Although the three teachers in this study were all unique individuals, some of their viewpoints on teaching and
their students proved to be amazingly similar. In general, these three teachers loved teaching and found teaching adults particularly rewarding. They all genuinely liked this particular group of students, and would have taught them again if the opportunity arose. The desire to do the best teaching job they could was also a common desire these teachers all shared.

Description

Although this group of teachers came from very different backgrounds, they did share some similar personal characteristics that were surprising. However, in looking at their differences, it is interesting to note that in general characteristics they shared nothing in common as far as gender, age, ethnic or family background. They were: Kate, a white, 26 year old female; Joe, a white, 40ish male; and Donna, a black, 40ish female. They had originally come from different parts of the country and had lived in a variety of different settings as well. Aside from that they all had similar personality preferences (extravert, intuitive, thinking, judging [ENTJ]) according to the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey and Bates, 1978), and representational systems (digital) according to the Representational System Bias Test (Lewis and Pucelik, 1982). The only differences were in conflict resolution styles and learning styles, as measured by the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas and Kilmann, 1974) and the Learning
Style Inventory (Kolb, 1981). In conflict style, Kate and Donna were both compromisers, and Joe was an avoider. In learning styles, Kate and Donna were accommodators, and Joe was a converger.

Another difference was their educational background. Kate and Donna had Master’s degrees, and Joe had a doctorate. Kate had both a Bachelor of Arts and a Master of Arts in Speech/Communication. Donna had a Bachelor of Science in Education with history as her major and communication and political science as her minors, and also a Master of Arts in Education. Like Donna, Joe had a Bachelor of Science in Education, but his majors were in communication and psychology. Joe’s M. A. and Ph.D. were both in Psychology. The only similarity among these teachers was that at some point in their education they had all studied communication.

The training that each received in education was also very different. Kate had no formal teacher training, while Donna and Joe both had a Bachelor of Science in Education. Their teaching experiences were also varied. Kate had only taught either college undergraduates or adult professionals. Donna had taught everything from pre-school through college, and Joe had taught only in traditional institutions of higher learning. The length of teaching experience also varied from five years to thirty some years. Although their backgrounds and education were definitely different, there
were some intriguing similarities in their view of teaching and their view of the students.  

Perception of the Teacher

For each of these teachers, the perceived role of a teacher was someone who encouraged the students to grow and learn. To see students grasp an idea or change their way of thinking seemed to be what made teaching exciting for each of these teachers. They also valued being an important part of the learning process. They all felt a strong responsibility for getting each student to learn and grow. Teaching was also viewed as a way for these teachers to continue growing and learning themselves. This growth could either be in the way they taught or it could be in gaining new insights into the content or subject matter of what they were teaching. This ability to grow and change was particularly important to both Kate and Donna. These two teachers also felt that the role of the teacher was to relate to the students on a personal level and to be able to adapt and change their methods and style of teaching to fit the different students that they encountered. Joe, on the other hand, didn’t seem to be as involved with the students personally. He also recognized that he needed to be more adaptable in his teaching style, but expressed that he was having difficulty achieving that level of flexibility.

In considering their personal role as a teacher, all of these teachers shared the view that they wanted to be the
best teacher they could be. They took great pride in their work and spent many hours preparing for each class so that it would be a rewarding experience for their students. They all expressed the desire to get their students excited about the particular course that they were teaching, and to encourage the growth and learning of every student in class. Because of this strong sense of responsibility to the students and to making the classroom experience the best possible, they were also all striving constantly to improve their teaching. In addition, they all saw teaching as a production or a performance which could stem from their training in the field of speech/communication. They had all previously had some type of acting experience as well, with Donna actually being a card carrying member of the Screen Actors Guild. Beyond these similarities, the teachers soon revealed their differences.

Kate and Donna seemed to share the most similarities in their approach to their role as teacher. They both felt that establishing a relationship with their students was important. They wanted to present themselves as open, approachable individuals who respected and valued each of their students. Joe also expressed a great deal of caring and concern for his students, but he recognized that students had a hard time at least initially relating to him.

Kate and Donna also felt the awesome responsibility of serving as a role model for their students. The methods
they used to teach were varied, and they both shared their own personal experiences with their students as a way to illustrate different concepts that they were teaching. They were also very reflective of their teaching and used their observations and reflections to make on-going changes in their teaching. They both felt a need to reach and teach every student that they had in class. On the other hand, although he was concerned about his students, Joe did not seem as concerned about having a relationship with his students. Although Joe viewed himself as being positive and caring toward students, he knew that his personality and style of teaching would only appeal to 80 or 90 percent of his students. Although he also wanted to be the perfect teacher for all of his students, he had recognized the impossibility of actually achieving that. He was also reflective of his teaching, but approached it in a more objective way and realized that instead of changing his style or approach to teaching that some of his tried and true methods tended to get a more positive response from the students.

Perception of Students

Since how teachers perceive their students can have an impact on the teaching/learning experience, it was interesting to note how these three teachers perceived students in general and how they perceived this particular group of students. Because these teachers generally liked
teaching, their overall reaction to their students was positive.

When these teachers were asked to talk about or think about what these students would be like before actually meeting them, all of the teachers were hesitant to make any generalizations. They preferred instead to see what the students were like for themselves. Even the teachers, who followed other teachers in the sequence and could have had access to a lot of information on the students, did not want to know anything about the students. They essentially did not want to be prejudiced toward the students, and wanted to come to their own conclusions about the students and their behavior. Donna, the final teacher in the sequence, probably described this best by pointing out that since each teacher was different that the students would react differently every time there was a new teacher. So these teachers felt that it was the relationship that each teacher established with the students that would determine a lot of the classroom outcomes.

Even though these teachers did not want to form their own opinions of these students before they actually met them, they were able to identify some of the general characteristics that they had previously observed while teaching adult students. All of the teachers found adult students to be responsible, dedicated, motivated learners, who would work harder than more traditional students. Adult
students were seen as wanting to do well, but having a certain anxiety about being able to succeed as students, and succeed in this program. All of the teachers expected these students to change and grow as a result of this educational experience. Because the focus of this program was on group interaction, Kate and Donna also expected that the students would come together as a cohesive group. All of the teachers were excited about the prospect of teaching this group and knew that it would be fun.

When the teachers finally met these students, it was interesting that they identified similar characteristics for this group of students. The first thing, that all of the instructors noticed and commented on, was that this was a very verbal, talkative group who liked expressing their opinions. They also noticed that this was a very cohesive group with students who were respectful of others and very supportive of other members of the group. This perception of group cohesiveness was surprising because all the teachers also noted the diversity in this group of students. Not only was this group talkative and cohesive, but as the teachers pointed out, these students genuinely enjoyed being together and found learning fun. As the teachers expected, the students all did want to do well, and except for one or two students they were highly motivated to learn. The teachers also noticed that the self-confidence of the students seemed to increase during the duration of the
course. Overall, the teachers found this group to be a very enjoyable, challenging group to teach.

In looking at the teachers' perceived students' reaction to them as teachers, it seemed difficult for the teachers to describe this. It seemed more important to the teachers to look at how they reacted to the students, rather than look at the students reaction to the teachers. The focus for these teachers seemed to be more on the students than on themselves. However, even though the teachers were reticent to look at how they might be coming across to the students, both Kate and Donna felt that the students were reacting positively to them. They based this impression on the behavior of the students toward them. They felt accepted and included in the discussions outside of class, and were invited to join the class for celebrations. With these two, there seemed to be a level of comfort that was established with this group where the students could share their own personal lives with the teacher. In addition, the students seemed to be having such a positive experience learning with Kate and Donna that the students did not want to leave when class was over. Joe also felt that most of the students reacted to him positively and liked his way of teaching. However, he also realized that there were certain students who would not like him, but he was not sure who those students would be until the class was over, and he had received the evaluations. He apparently did not have as
close a relationship with the students as Kate and Donna did.

Although these teachers were all striving to encourage growth and change in every student, their comments about change were focused more on the group as a whole. The major change that they all noted was that the group seemed to become more cohesive during the time that they were taking that particular course. They also noted that the students were accepting and getting to know each other better. Kate and Donna noticed that the students who were initially talkative were becoming quieter and the quiet students were becoming more talkative. All of the teachers also observed a change in the students' thinking. The change that the teachers observed was that the students were becoming more aware and were improving their analytical skills. This seemed to contribute to the teachers' perception that the confidence level of the students in general had increased. All of the changes that these teachers observed were perceived as positive.

Perception of Learning

Even though each of the teachers taught a different subject, the anticipated learning outcomes seemed to focus on more general things. One thing that all of the teachers hoped the students would gain from their course was a better insight into human behavior. Along with this, they were hoping that the students would gain a greater understanding
of themselves and as a consequence increase their awareness of their own and others' behavior. The last two teachers, Joe and Donna, also wanted the students to change the way they were thinking and be more critical in their analysis of situations.

Since their expectations of student learning probably had an effect on the actual outcomes, the teachers identified in their students some of the same learning they had anticipated. All of the teachers felt that the students had learned the general concepts that were presented in each of the courses. In addition to this, they felt that the students had learned how to interact with each other and had learned to appreciate other viewpoints. They also noticed that the students learned to value their own comments and gained a sense of self-confidence from this. According to these teachers, the students were also learning how to learn, and particularly how to learn in a non-traditional format. The level of awareness and understanding that these students had for others and for human behavior was also observed to have increased.

Personal Learning for Teacher

Since all of these teachers were striving to make changes in their teaching, it was not surprising to see them reflect on what they learned from this experience. Because of their desire to make changes and improve on their teaching, each of the teachers felt that he/she could have
done something differently or would make changes next time he/she taught this course. For example, with a highly verbal class like this one, all of the teachers recognized that they really had to be on their toes and be very flexible in their approach. In addition, they also felt that they had gained new insights into the course content from the different viewpoints that were brought up in class. Even though the teachers were reflective about their teaching and felt they had a new perspective on the subject matter, the teacher’s perceptions of this experience and their teaching seemed to reinforce their previously held beliefs about teaching and learning.

In reflecting on their teaching, there were specific aspects that these teachers mentioned. For example, the major thing that Kate learned was that a class couldn’t always end on a positive note and that that was all right for that to happen. As he had previously hypothesized, Joe found that the classroom setting had an initial impact on his teaching. In addition, he noticed that this particular class did not seem concerned about what they had learned previously or what they were going to be learning which was somewhat different from other classes he had taught. As with previous classes, Donna realized that she needed to be more involved with certain students or they would get lost. All of the teachers were surprised and delighted that they were able to share their teaching experiences with a
colleague. They all pointed out that no one had previously done this and that most institutions didn’t seem to be interested in how teachers felt about how they were teaching.

**Synthesis of Combined Perceptions**

**Similarities**

Although each of the teachers had a unique relationship with this group of students, there were some key areas where teachers and students perceived the teaching/learning situation in a similar fashion. First of all, the general areas that seemed to hold the most meaning for both teachers and students were in the relationship that the students had with each other, and the relationship that they had with the teacher. The area of least concern for both teachers and students was the specific content or subject matter of each course. However, they all shared similar views that an educational experience would result in change and growth particularly in the students.

The general perception of the group as a whole by all participants was that this was a very talkative group. Although everyone also recognized how diverse this group was, they did point out how very cohesive, and accepting it was. Both teachers and students all perceived that they were all learning a lot from each other. Students were learning from other students and the teacher, and the
teacher was learning from the class as well. They all shared a desire to learn and grow.

In looking at the similarities in the relationship between teachers and students, it was interesting to note that all of the teachers felt that they had a positive relationship with the students and for the most part the students felt similarly. When looking at specific characteristics of each of the teachers, both the teachers and the students tended to correctly identify the same personal traits and also the same characteristics of teaching style. In other words, the teachers perceived themselves as individuals and their teaching methods in the same way that their students perceived these same characteristics.

In the area of change, both the teachers and the students recognized similar changes occurring. One change that was observed by all was how cohesive this group continued to become. In addition, both teachers and students perceived an increase in the general level of self-confidence for the group as a whole, with Cindy, Jessica and Richard being readily identified as having changed the most. Everyone noticed that for Cindy and Jessica their levels of interaction had increased, and that they were more confident in expressing their viewpoints. Richard was seen as fitting into the group more. Everyone recognized that the whole group of students had definitely grown in their awareness of
human behavior and their ability to step back and analysis it. They all saw how the students had taken their learning and been able to apply it to their lives.

Overall, the thing that seemed to have the most meaning for all concerned was the social aspect of learning. What was important to all of the participants in this educational endeavor was the relationships that they were developing with the others in the class and with the teacher. In addition, the increase in awareness and understanding of human behavior seemed to be applied to the relationships that were occurring.

Differences

Because all of the participants in this study are unique individuals, most of the differences that were noticed were due to individual differences. Other perceived differences, especially between teachers and students, seemed to arise because the students had a different relationship with their classmates than the teacher did. As such, the students were able to pick up on more in-depth issues and relationships that were occurring with other students and were more observant of changes in student behavior due to having more knowledge of each student over a longer period of time.

One key difference was that each of the teachers established a different type of relationship with the students. Kate and Donna seemed to have a closer
relationship to the students than Joe, and as such their perception of what was occurring in class was more in tune with what the students were perceiving about their educational experience.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The primary focus of this research endeavor was to explore and gain an understanding of the meaning that students and teachers attached to their educational experience, and to see what impact that had on the teaching/learning process. Although an educational experience is complex and involves a variety of components, certain elements began to emerge as more important than others as the stories of both the students and the teachers began to unfold. The students and teachers also revealed through their comments that what they found meaningful had an impact on their learning and teaching. It is just those key aspects that were seen as both meaningful and important from the perspective of the students and teachers, and the impact those key aspects had on teaching and learning that will be discussed in this section. In addition, a discussion of the role of the researcher in this research is also included.
Key Aspects that were Meaningful

As revealed by the students and the teachers in this study, what was most meaningful and important to them was the relationship aspect of the experience. From the student perspective, the key aspects were their relationship with their teacher, their relationship with their classmates, and their relationship with themselves. Similarly for the teachers, the relationship they developed with their students, and the relationships that the students had with each other were perceived as important and essential to the teaching/learning experience.

Student Perspective

When students were specifically asked which part of the educational experience was most important or meaningful to their learning, their responses identified the teacher, the other students, themselves, and the content (in this context, interpreted as subject matter), with the teacher being identified by more students as being most important. As Mealman (1991) also found, several of the students had difficulty separating out the most meaningful aspect of their educational experience since they saw all of these components inextricably interrelated. This perception of the interaction of educational influences was also consistent with Schubert’s (1986) broad view of curriculum as "the entire culture of the classroom. Everything that happens there, everything that could influence a student, is
assumed to fall within the four commonplaces" (p. 301). These four commonplaces are "teachers, learners, subject matter, and milieu" (p. 301). It is interesting to note that the students in this study did not identify milieu or context as an important influence on their learning, but instead focused more on themselves as individual learners having an impact on their learning.

Of the four student generated aspects, I noticed that in general the students were most concerned about 1) their relationship with the teacher, 2) their relationship to the other students, 3) their own personal issues; and they were least concerned about 4) the content or subject matter of the course. This ordering of importance seemed somewhat antithetical to a more traditional model of education in which the communication of some type of objective knowledge is central. So the following discussion will pay special attention to understanding this phenomenon.

Student Relationship with Teacher

Since the relationship with the teacher was seen as most important to the students' learning, an understanding of this relationship and the effect it had on student learning seemed essential. In general, the students felt that their relationship with the teacher had either a positive, or negative effect on their learning. Based on the interviews, the students suggested that a teacher who was well liked by the class had the most positive effect on
student learning. On the other hand, negative experiences with a teacher seemed to have a negative impact on student learning. This was also indicated by Weston (1993) in reference to younger learners when he stated, "the kind and quality of the learner/teacher relationship a child experiences in school will either positively or negatively affect the child's perception of school and of learning" (p. 845). Although most of the students in this group expressed having had a positive experience with all of the teachers, it is interesting to note which students had a positive, negative, or neutral experience with which teachers. Some of the influences on the students' perception of this relationship that were identified by the students were the teacher's perceived willingness to have a relationship, the teacher's perception of the students, the teacher's style of teaching, and the student's past experiences with teachers.

In this study, the teachers that the students on the whole viewed as having a positive influence were those who valued their students and their relationship with the students. From their past experience either as a student or as a teacher, these teachers, who were perceived positively, realized how important it was to relate to students and to understand the students' viewpoint. Donna, who was particularly well liked by the students and viewed by them as a positive influence, had a vast experience teaching a variety of levels. It was from these experiences that she
realized the importance of establishing a relationship with the students by respecting them, getting them involved in their own learning, and communicating to them that she really cared about them and their learning. The students seemed to sense this genuine caring and concern and found it easy to relate to Donna. Dodd (1995) supported this by saying that,

by inviting students to share their feelings and perceptions, teachers can establish positive relationships with them and thus minimize classroom problems. But even more important, they will discover how to modify their teaching methods and personalize assignments in ways that engage students in learning. (p. 66)

On the other hand, Joe, who also cared about the students and wanted students to share their ideas and feelings with him, was perceived differently, and students had some difficulty relating to him. Perhaps it was Joe’s past experience teaching traditional undergraduates in large lecture hall settings where there was little opportunity to work closely with the students or to be involved with them on a more personal level that may have influenced his ability to establish the kind of relationship he would have liked to establish. One of the difficulties several of the students identified in relating to Joe was a perceived aloofness that could have contributed to their negative perception. In fact, one of the students thought that Joe appeared to "have a wall up and wasn’t real with them." In contrast, Kate and Donna were seen as much more
approachable. This corresponded to what Weston (1993) found with younger children,

What all of the above appears to suggest is that in order to reach and teach young children, a teacher must first be able to connect with them in a kind, loving, and nurturing way. The teacher must also be accessible to the children both physically and emotionally. This kind of relationship is essential for a positive bonding between a teacher and child to occur. Based upon my own experience, and from listening to the children at Dawson and Deer Park, I believe this kind of bonding between a teacher and his or her children is absolutely necessary in order for young children to be able to learn anything in school. That is, anything other than to be afraid of adults, and how to obey authority. (p. 845)

Forty years earlier, Manbeck (1953) had a similar finding when he interviewed high school students and found their perception of an effective teacher was one who possessed "qualities of personality which foster relationships satisfying to the pupil" (p. 134). In general, being perceived by the students as open to establishing a relationship and being approachable as a person were important characteristics of the perceived positive relationship between teacher and students.

Successfully communicating a teacher’s belief that the student had the ability and could succeed in school seemed to be another element in the perceived positive or negative relationship that a student had with a teacher. Although all of the teachers reported that they wanted the students to grow and change, Kate and Donna believed that every student in the class would succeed, and that it was their job to help those students succeed. Even though Joe
recognized and valued growth in his students, he felt that there were certain students who were just not as capable of learning the material. This difference in teacher attitude and perception of the students could have contributed to the students' differing reactions to the teachers. As Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) pointed out in their studies on the Pygmalion Effect, teacher expectations did have an impact on student learning, and these students perceived their relationship more positively with the teachers who believed the students would succeed.

The teacher's style of teaching was also identified as having contributed to the perception students had of the teacher and their relationship to that teacher. Kate and Donna saw themselves as part of the group and saw their role as guiding the discussions that occurred and pointing out important learning opportunities. They were much more relaxed in their approach to the structure of the class and allowed the students to determine what they wanted to learn from the class. On the other hand, Joe had a specific agenda to accomplish, and the students were well aware of this. Joe was also more comfortable with the lecture method instead of the more discussion based method employed by the other teachers. For some students who were more comfortable with traditional classroom settings, this more structured teacher was a positive experience. However, for those students who wanted to be active participants in their
learning and who liked the non-traditional approach of discussions, simulations, and role plays, this more structured approach was viewed negatively because it did not allow for the type of learning the students felt was necessary. In his review of research on teacher effectiveness in adult education, Lindsay (1984) also found "that a more indirect method, in which the learners contributed decisions to their own learning experiences, may have been more beneficial for adults than was the more didactic emphasis on delivering content in task-achievement manner" (p. 5). It appears that with adult students a non-traditional style of teaching with more student involvement may be regarded more positively.

Finally, the student’s past experience with school and teachers was identified as having had an effect on his or her reaction to and perception of the teachers in this study. Most of the students in this program were returning adult students and as such had discontinued their education for a number of reasons. In the case of this particular group, a number of students described very negative experiences with traditional education which seemed to have negatively influenced how they perceived certain teachers in this program. Since these students were not as successful with a more traditional, lecture style approach in the classroom, this could have contributed to the students’ negative reaction to Joe’s style of teaching. On the other
hand, Kate’s and Donna’s more accepting, nurturing approach could have been viewed more positively because it did not remind the students of their past failures with schooling. Many of the students were surprised at how much fun learning was now in a non-traditional way, and those teachers who reinforced that style of learning were also perceived as enjoyable. In addition, many of the students expressed an insecurity and lack of self-confidence, especially with their learning. This lack of confidence could also have predisposed them to viewing teachers with more accepting, supportive and nurturing characteristics in a more positive light, while a more demanding, structured teacher would have reinforced some of their insecurities and thus have been regarded negatively. Past experience with school, then, seemed to have an almost predictable influence on the students’ perception of different teachers and their style of teaching.

Initially, it was hoped that differences on the various assessment instruments used in this study might suggest a way of predicting student reactions and perceptions of their relationship to the different teachers. In actuality, the results on these assessments were only useful in providing an intuitive guide for interpreting student comments. In order to give an idea of the type of information obtained from these assessments, the following is a summary of that information. First, all of the teachers were the same
temperament type (ENTJ) as determined by the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey and Bates, 1978), so temperament type could not be used to distinguish among the different reactions and relationships that were established. Similarly, on the Representational System Bias Test (Lewis and Pucelik, 1982), the teachers also all preferred the digital or metacognitive mode in processing information. Once again, this provided little information to differentiate among the teachers.

There were, however, teacher differences on the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas and Kilmann, 1974), and the Learning-Style Inventory (Kolb, 1981). On the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (Thomas and Kilmann, 1974), Kate and Donna scored high on compromising to resolve conflict as did most of the students. Joe, on the other hand, scored very high in avoiding. Since avoiding did not match with the students' primary methods of resolving conflict, this provided some additional insights into the students' perceptions of this instructor as being "not real" or unapproachable. In addition, on the Learning-Style Inventory (Kolb, 1981), Kate and Donna scored high as Accommodators, and Joe scored high as a Converger. Since most of the students scored high as Accommodators, this shared similarity with Kate and Donna could have had an effect on the students' perception of these two teachers.
Group Relationships

Another area that students focused on as important was their relationship to the other members of the group. The value they placed on their interactions with other learners seemed to be an important aspect or influence on individual learning. In understanding the importance of this relationship and its effect on their learning, I noticed that certain things seemed to influence their perception of this relationship. One was the experience base that other students brought to the learning situation, and the other was the basic premise of the program and the sequence of courses.

First, the students continually expressed appreciation for the wide range of experiences, insights and perspectives that other students shared in class. This sharing by other students seemed to add new understandings and ways of thinking about issues that some students had not previously considered. The general feeling that emerged from the interviews was that this sharing seemed to add a richness to the learning that was experienced.

Of course, the value placed on other students' input might simply have been influenced by the basic premise of the program and by the sequence of the courses. Since the students were told at the beginning of the program that their fellow classmates were an important part of their learning, this idea could have influenced their responses
and determined what they saw as important to their learning. In addition, the first course in the sequence, Dynamics of Group Behavior, further supported this idea of the importance of the group, and had as one of its objectives getting the group to work as a cohesive whole. With this emphasis in the program on the importance of the group to each individual’s learning, it was possible that the students’ reporting of the importance of the group was merely a reiteration of what they had been told was important. Also, since the courses under examination in this study all focused on getting to know and understand the relationships between people better, it is possible that the students found relationships with the others in the class to be important because they were being encouraged to look at those specific relationships.

In trying to understand the effects of the group on the individual’s learning or the meaning constructed of the learning experience, the students seemed to indicate that these effects could be either positive or negative. To illustrate from the interviews, the students’ perception of the group was generally positive with the group being described as very accepting and supportive. As such, many of the students saw the group as a safe place for them to risk new behavior (i.e., individual presentations). This trying out of new behaviors and feeling free to openly express their opinions seemed to have a positive effect on
student learning and growth. On the negative side, there were specific group behaviors that frustrated different students and seemed to have a negative effect on their learning. In the interviews, when the students described the group as talkative, this was seen as both a positive and negative attribute. As a positive, this characteristic enhanced the sharing that occurred; but as a negative, this talkativeness was seen as disruptive with students often so eager to share that they would talk over other students or would not let other students complete their thoughts. In addition, many side conversations would be going on at once making it difficult for other students to make sense of what was being said.

In sharing personal experiences with the group, the students also saw this as both positive and negative. As a positive, this sharing of experiences provided new insights into other members of the class and to the concepts being presented. As a negative, students began to describe class sessions as group therapy with people constantly bringing in their personal problems. Some of the students felt that these personal problems or experiences did not relate to the subject matter of the course and as such were not contributing to their individual learning. In addition, the students also began to realize that certain students had their own personal agendas and that any concept or topic that was brought up for discussion would eventually be
brought around to those personal issues, which were usually racial, gender, or life style issues. This was seen by some students as rehashing old issues and not contributing in a positive way to any new learning. In general, the group was viewed as important to their learning because of the different experiences and perspectives each student brought to the relationship, but the effect of the group on student learning was both positive and negative.

Individual

Not only were the relationship with the teacher and the group important to these students, but they also saw how important the self and self-motivation were to learning. Focusing on themselves as learners as being an important part of the learning experience could also stem from a variety of influences.

First of all, since the emphasis of the program was on sharing student experiences, this could have had an impact on their perception of themselves as important to the learning process. Since it was frequently mentioned in the instructional guides that student discussion and sharing of experiences was important, it was clear that the program was designed to encourage students to share their personal experiences and to relate their learning to their own lives. In addition, most of the course assignments or evaluation pieces focused on analyzing the student's experiences in light of course concepts. As such, the students were much
more focused on themselves and their own learning instead of any specific subject matter issues. Furthermore, consistent with the theme of the three courses covered, if the students were hearing from their classmates and teachers that they as individuals were valuable and that their opinions and experiences were important, this could have influenced the students' thinking as well.

Since adults have a number of commitments in their lives outside of school, some of the students began to recognize that these outside demands were having an effect on their learning. To some students, their life outside of the classroom was seen as very supportive and encouraging of their learning. In fact, some of what they were learning in class could be directly applied to their situations outside of class with some positive results. This application of their learning was considered as an important part of their learning. Mealman (1991) found this to be true with the adult students he studied. On the other hand, some students found that the pressures and demands of their family were too much along with the pressures of school, and this made it hard for the students to focus on classroom work. However, regardless of these outside demands, the students felt that without the desire and motivation on the part of the individual student to learn that nothing would be learned.
Content

From the interviews, I understood the students' references to the term content to mean subject matter. With this understanding in mind, of the four key aspects mentioned previously, the content or subject matter of the courses seemed to be the least meaningful and least important to the students. In attempting to understand this seeming lack of importance of the subject matter, the students' comments revealed that the students' past experience and the format of the program seemed to have an influence on their perception of the subject matter.

First of all, the students' perception of the subject matter and the subsequent meaning and importance they attached to it could have been influenced by their past experience with that subject matter. Some of the ideas from Malcolm Knowles (1984) on adult education could offer some insights. As Knowles points out, adult students focus more on learning things that can be directly applied to their lives and that satisfy their need to know. As a number of students pointed out, the courses under study did not provide any new information or knowledge to them. Most of them had either experienced the subject matter of the courses for themselves in their daily lives or learned the course concepts previously on their own or in another educational setting. In this case, since these students had already learned the concepts, their need to know was not
present. Although the subject matter was not new to them, the students did recognize that the information and concepts that were presented to them reinforced their prior learning and/or gave them new labels for behaviors of which they were already aware or actually using. The students’ strong interest in studying human behavior could also have contributed to a familiarity with the subject matter of these courses.

Second, the format of the program could also have contributed to the lack of importance the students ascribed to the subject matter of the course. Since this program was designed according to Knowles’ (1984) theory where concepts and theories presented in the classroom are applied to real life contexts, this focus on the application of the concept, then, may have become more important than the concept itself. In other words, the students may have been reflecting this focus on application, and consequently regarding the subject matter as less important or valuable to them. Another possibility is that the students could have interpreted the subject matter as meaningful only in the context of its applicability. Regardless of what influenced their perception of the content or subject matter of the course, these students did not find it as meaningful or important to their learning as their relationships with their teachers and classmates.
Teacher Perspective

When asked what part or parts of the educational experience were most meaningful or important to the teachers, their unanimous response was the students. What these teachers found most rewarding was the joy of watching the students grow and change. They enjoyed the interaction with the students and liked to watch how each student and the group as a whole were changing in their levels of awareness and in their self-confidence. Kate and Donna strongly valued the relationship that they had with their students, and they both felt that they were learning along with their students. Since all of the teachers loved learning themselves, it is possible that they took great satisfaction in seeing that others shared their interest. This interest in their students and in the relationships that were developing in the classroom could also be related to the fact that all of these teachers had chosen the field of human behavior and, in particular, communication as something they enjoyed studying themselves.

Common Understandings

In looking for the common understandings and perceptions that teachers and students divulged, what emerged were indeed areas where both the teachers and the students focused on similar aspects of the teaching/learning experience. Two key areas where student and teacher perceptions were similar were in regard to the importance of
First of all, both the teachers and the students seemed to focus less on the content or subject matter and more on the teacher-student relationship. This emphasis on relationships over content could be interpreted as the teachers' recognition of the importance of establishing some kind of rapport with the students in order to be effective in the classroom. These teachers could also have been influenced in this area by their common background in communication studies which emphasizes the need to assess and adapt to the audience in order to effectively communicate their message. In addition, the teachers' personal objectives for the class were to increase student awareness of human behavior and to foster critical thinking, so their focus was not on specific subject matter. Since the teachers focused more on the relationships in class rather than the subject matter, it is possible the students then reflected this interest and focused their energy and time on the same issues.

Second, both teachers and students did seem to value the relationships that were established among the group members. This could be influenced by the students and teachers shared interest in human behavior. Since both teachers and students were drawn to this field of study, it seemed only natural that they would share this common value.
One final area where teachers and students held common perceptions was in the area of learning or change. Although they approached it from different perspectives, both teachers and students were interested in student learning or change. The students perceived this learning as part of their interest in themselves as individuals, and the teachers saw this learning as part of their relationship with their students. They both valued and recognized that the students did become more aware of human behavior, showed a deeper understanding of the motivations for behavior, and showed an increase in self-confidence. Part of this awareness could be influenced by the students being constantly encouraged to expand their awareness by each of the instructors in the program. In addition, this emphasis on change could be influenced by the program itself (i.e., the instructional guides, teacher selection, texts, etc.) which was modeled on adult education theories (Cranton, 1993; Knowles, 1984; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991) and practices that encourage growth and change. The increase in student self-confidence could be as simple as gaining experience and having repeated successes for the students, or it could be related to the teachers' belief that the students could do well in class and thus encouraged a sense of self-confidence. Once again the Pygmalion Effect (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968) could be used to understand this occurrence.
To summarize, what the students and teachers found most meaningful and had the most effect on their experience in the classroom were their interpersonal relationships. For the students, this included the relationships that they had with the teacher, the other students and themselves. For the teacher, their relationship with their students was of primary importance. Of least importance to both teachers and students was the subject matter. This emphasis on interpersonal relationships and de-emphasis on knowledge of subject matter was also found by Manbeck (1953).

Impact on Learning and Teaching

Not only did this research attempt to gain an understanding of what aspects were meaningful and important to the participants in their educational experience, but it was also concerned with understanding the impact those key aspects had on learning and teaching. One pattern that emerged that might reasonably be interpreted as learning was the issue of change which occurred over the course of this study for both students and teachers. For the students, the changes they perceived focused on their own growth and development as a person, and their increased awareness of the behavior of others. They were also able to perceive similar changes in other members of their group. The teachers, on the other hand, noticed these changes in their students but were less aware of any changes they had experienced in themselves. Since change was generally
described in more emotional terms, this suggested that the affective aspects of learning may be more important to the experience of learning than the cognitive aspects.

Student Learning and Change

The first area where the students perceived a change was in their own personal growth and development. The majority of the students in this study commented on how much they had grown personally. To Cindy, this change was very dramatic to the point that she even felt that she had "developed a new persona." Most of the other students saw this change in themselves as an increase in self-confidence and in their ability to handle different situations. They also described being more aware of who they were as a person which included a deeper understanding of their personal attributes, their personality type, and their learning style. This personal awareness was also revealed in comments about becoming more aware of their own behavior as it related to others. All of these perceived changes in themselves and growth as individuals seemed to be consistent with the humanistic view of learning as personal development. Cranton (1994) summarized this theory as follows, "the humanists of the 1960s viewed learning as personal development resulting from interaction with others or as nondirective facilitations of self-awareness" (p. 8).

On the other hand, much of the reported changes that occurred were marked by a highly emotional and affective
One such issue was how their underlying emotional reaction to their classroom experience was having an effect on their learning. The most dramatic example of this was Amy, when she pointed out that she just couldn’t learn when she was emotionally upset. Or as she put it,

I’m just here physically because I have to be here physically, but mentally I’m really not here. I hear them talking...I knew it was really interesting. I couldn’t get it. I tried, and I couldn’t get it, because I wasn’t thinking about what she was saying. I was thinking about what I had to do, and you can’t learn when you’re not ready. You know, you can’t just sit down and say "Oh, I’m going to learn this today." You have to make sure that there’s enough light, that there’s quiet, that you can concentrate, and that you can get something out of it. So, it’s really how you feel, and if you’re ready to learn.

Other examples were Diane’s emotional reaction to giving a presentation, and Harriet’s reaction to getting a low grade. Diane’s emotional reaction to giving a presentation was so strong that she never even mentioned the content or subject matter of that presentation. As she explained,

What I mostly learned was that even though I was scared to the bottom of my toes, I was able to conquer that and give that presentation at the end. And that’s a really hard thing for me to do. I’ve volunteered to flunk a class in college rather than give a speech. Because I can walk into a crowd, pick a group, and hold the center of attention. But to stand up, all eyes on me, focused, listening to what I have to say, I fill my boots...I got tongue-tied, and my brain got tongue-tied. I was shaken to the core.

So what Diane learned from that classroom experience was in the emotional conquering of fear. Harriet’s experience also revealed how emotions can interfere with learning. As she described it,
I had a great presentation, but it was on the whole film that I saw, and I was just amazed by the fact that I wasn't listening to what he said. I followed the directions in the student guide, and not what he said, and I didn't get my A. I didn't crack a book for about a week after that. I didn't even take my stuff out of the trunk. I was really mortified.

In this case, an emotional reaction to something that happened in class had such a powerful impact on this student that she didn't even want to learn.

This observed emphasis on the more emotional side of the learning experience seems to be consistent with some of the new research on the brain. In his summary of that research for educators, Sylwester (1993-94) pointed out "the powerful role that emotion plays in regulating brain activity" (p. 48). Contrary to popular belief, this new brain research has revealed that the limbic system (or site of our emotions) has far more influence on the cortex (or site of logic and cognition) than the reverse. With emotion having such a powerful impact on their learning, this seemed to be true for the students in this study as well.

Another affective issue that also seemed to have an impact on student learning was the emotional aspects of the interpersonal relationships that the students had with their classmates and their teachers. To illustrate, the students often expressed frustration with their classmates and occasionally with a teacher. Some of them even felt that this frustration interfered with their learning. The most common frustration expressed about a teacher was in trying
to understand the assignments. As Harriet illustrated above, this was particularly upsetting to them when their grade was lower than expected because they had not understood the assignment.

In regard to their classmates, a number of students expressed frustration with the lack of focus and lack of understanding that they saw in their fellow students. For example, Diane described that she

actually in class lost my cool with somebody. Ummm, mostly Kathy, but just the, the, the three of them because I was getting no cooperation. So I had a confrontation with members of the group, you know, sub-group... of frustration and anger... I found it interesting that... Diane had that little blow-up. But it was understandable because of the level of frustration that was building.

As a result of her frustration and subsequent outburst, their discussion was unproductive, and Diane felt that she had not learned anything. Amy, as well, was frustrated with other students who didn’t understand, and expressed that frustration by saying,

It’s amazing that I’m in a group with college students, and it doesn’t matter their age or their background. The information is in the book, it’s written on the board, and it’s explained to us. And still there are five questions. "How many pages? When is it due? What does it have to be about?" This is our third summary paper. These people don’t get it.

So again, emotion had a powerful impact on student learning.

Since one of the general assumptions of education is that some kind of cognitive change or growth will occur, it was surprising that the students in this study consistently mentioned the emotional aspects of their learning and made
very little mention of any specific concepts that were learned. In looking specifically at the cognitive aspects of their learning, the students did perceive that their awareness of human behavior and their ability to analyze that behavior had increased. However, since most of this increased awareness was not related back to any specific concepts, it was difficult to separate this out as a specifically cognitive change. In fact, to the contrary, most of the changes the students reported were described in terms of emotion, suggesting that the affective component of learning was dominant.

However, there was one student, Cindy, whose changes in the area of self-awareness were strikingly different from the other students. She began the program being very factual and superficial in her thinking and by the end of the program had developed, by her own account, into a very reflective, critical thinker. Since Cindy was so different from the others with this change in thinking, I was curious about this process.

In considering possible cognitive theories that might help in understanding Cindy better, Mezirow’s (1991) theory of transformative learning seemed to provide the best description of her change. According to Mezirow (1991), transformative learning progresses through a number of steps and involves critical self-reflection and a dialectic interaction with others in order to reach a new level of
thinking or synthesis. As he describes it, transformative learning involves an enhanced level of awareness of the context of one's beliefs and feelings, a critique of their assumptions and particularly premises, an assessment of alternative perspectives, a decision to negate an old perspective in favor of a new one or to make a synthesis of old and new, an ability to take action based upon the new perspective, and a desire to fit the new perspective into the broader context of one's life. (p. 161)

In applying Mezirow's (1991) theory of transformative learning to Cindy's experience, it was clear that Cindy developed a stronger sense of self, began to understand what had shaped her beliefs, developed a new perspective in a dialectic with her classmates and teachers, and put her new learning and perspective into practice. By way of illustration, Cindy went from being very shy and quiet with little self-confidence at the beginning of this study to being very outgoing with a strong sense of self, or as she described it, she "acquired her own voice." This would fit with Mezirow's (1991) "empowered sense of self" (p. 161).

In addition, Cindy became more critical in examining the influences on her thinking and her life. As she explained, all of her previous educational experiences in the field of nursing were focused more on memorization and did not require any independent or reflective thought. In this new non-traditional approach to learning, Cindy saw herself as becoming more reflective, and she was actually enjoying formulating questions and sharing her new
perspective. I can attest to this change in thinking in a dialectic that occurred between Cindy and me. One week Cindy came up to me in class and asked, "Why do you always ask why?" What ensued was a discussion about reflection and critical thinking. Although she was interested in what I was saying, she was not particularly convinced by my explanation. Several weeks later, she came to me again, and this time said to me, "I know why you ask why," which indicated her synthesis of her new way of thinking. She even revealed that she was putting this shift in thinking into practice at work. Since reflection and a transformation in perspective are key factors in transformative learning, I felt that Cindy's experience exemplified this type of learning. Cindy seemed to be unique, since this dramatic transformation and change in thinking did not seem to occur with the other students.

In considering the changes or learning that the students experienced, it seemed that emotional issues or affective aspects of learning were of primary importance. In general, changes in cognition seemed to be inextricably intertwined with the affective elements. This would suggest that both the affective as well as the cognitive aspects of learning need to be considered in an educational experience. Or as Beane (1990) suggested, "we must recognize the presence of all of them and seek ways to create opportunities for creatively integrating them" (p. 121).
Teacher Learning and Change

Although all of the teachers felt that they had learned from their students and seemed to enjoy the relationships that they had developed, there was little evidence of how this experience had impacted their own learning or change. When asked to reflect on their teaching experience, they would describe it as a positive experience and describe the changes in their students, but they did not specifically describe what they had learned or how they had changed as a result of this class.

In general, most of the teachers' insights into their teaching experience seemed to reinforce the previously held beliefs that they had about students, teaching, and learning. For example, all of the teachers expected that they would be able to see the students change and grow, and their experience with this class substantiated that belief. Joe's hypothesis that an unfamiliar classroom setting made him initially nervous was supported by his experience with this class, as was his expectation that the students would take some time to warm up to him as an instructor. The idea of staying on top of certain students in the class so they would not fall behind in their learning was also reinforced for Donna after teaching this class. Kate, however, appeared to have a change in her thinking about teaching when she experienced a class session that did not end on a positive note. Some of her students helped her realize that
it was all right for this to happen because it was real life. In the future, Kate felt that she would not be upset if the classroom experience was not always positive. Aside from this incident, the teachers were not able to perceive any changes in their thinking about teaching. They were, however, pleased to share their thoughts and insights about their teaching with a colleague.

It appears from what the students and teachers revealed about the important aspects of their experience in the classroom and the impact it had on their learning and teaching, that personal, emotional, and relational issues are important and do have an impact on student learning, but have less of an impact on learning or change in teachers. In addition, this study revealed that the interpersonal relationships in the classroom were more important to students and teachers than the subject matter or course content.

Role of the Researcher

In any research endeavor that involves interaction between the researcher and the subject, researcher influence is always a possibility. Since I not only interviewed these students, but also served as one of their instructors, as well as being their coordinator and advisor, my influence on their thinking and responses was probably far greater than would normally be expected in an ethnographic study. My influence on the students was brought to my attention by
another instructor, (Robert Bruhl, personal communication, April, 1995) who had instructed these students three months after my data collection was completed. He pointed out that one of my students had commented to him that they needed to be on their best behavior because it would get back to me, and I would be upset. Because of my multiple roles with this group and their need for my help in successfully completing the entire program, the students wanted to please me. Because of this desire to please, the students could easily have changed or modified their responses to my questions based on what they thought I wanted to hear. They could also have picked up on my tone of voice during the interviews and recognized when something they said was of particular interest and then expanded on that topic leading me to believe that it was important to them when in reality it was important to me. In an attempt to avert this effort to please me by their responses, I chose to ask very open-ended questions for which it would be difficult for the students to predict the specific response that I desired. In addition, I spent a great deal of the time during the interviews just listening -- with very little input. I also used the responses of the other students and the teachers as a way of corroborating my perceptions.

Not only did the students have a strong desire to please, but they also were developing a very personal relationship with me. As the students pointed out in their
interviews, the relationship that the students had with their instructor was very important to them and to their learning. I was no exception. Even outside of the formal interview process, students would call with questions, problems and insights (though no more frequently than other groups I had coordinated in the past). I also sensed that many of them were beginning to see me as one of their friends and that they enjoyed our interactions. This personal relationship that developed between me and the students could have influenced the students’ responses to my questions. Since a lot of the information I gathered was of a very personal nature and focused on the personal and relationship aspects of their educational experience, it is possible that I perceived this as important to the students when it was the personal relationship that I had with the students that was important instead. Nevertheless, although establishing a personal relationship with the students may have strongly biased the information I obtained, I felt that "getting to know" the students on a deeper level was the most appropriate way to better understand in-depth the meaning perspectives that they had of their experiences. Since I actually experienced this group of students in a teaching/learning situation, I was able to more readily understand the students’ perception of their learning experience, and their reaction to other group members,
because I had actually observed how these students interacted with each other in their classroom setting.

Even the teachers were influenced by my presence. Since I had worked with, and established a relationship with the three instructors prior to this study, their desire to be helpful was evident from the beginning. Once again, I saw this as an asset to my research because there was little need to establish a rapport with these teachers, and it also provided a deeper understanding of their meaning perspectives. Once again my experience teaching this group of students made it easier to conceptualize the actual classroom experience. When a teacher would comment on a student or a classroom activity, I was able to share a common understanding with that teacher.

One surprising issue that revealed itself in my interviews with these instructors was that each of them expressed delight in sharing their classroom experiences with someone. They appreciated and valued being able to reflect on their experiences. In addition, they all felt that it was generally important to share their experiences with a colleague, and they lamented the fact that this was uncommon, especially in higher education. I think the fact that I was also teaching the same group of students made it easier for me to relate to the comments the teachers were making and for them to relate to me since we had similar classroom experiences. It became evident to me that
reflecting on and sharing classroom experiences is an important part of the teaching/learning experience for teachers.

CONCLUSION

From all of the information that was gathered from both teachers and students, the most important finding was how meaningful and important the classroom relationships were. Students recognized and valued their relationship with their teacher as being an important aspect of their learning. They also valued the impact the other students who were sharing the learning experience with them had on their own learning. The teachers in this study also valued the social aspect of learning and felt that the true meaning of education was in the interaction with their students. As Frank Smith (1995) put it,

Learning is also like physical growth in that it usually occurs without our being aware of it, it is long-lasting, and it requires a nurturing environment. It takes place as a result of social relationships (including relationships with the authors of books and with characters in books), and it pivots on personal identification. We learn from the kind of person we see ourselves as being like. (p. 589)
CHAPTER SIX

IMPLICATIONS

Given the interpretive nature of this research endeavor and that it was essentially a case study, few generalizations or theoretical assumptions can be made. However, it does provide a wide range of possible directions for future research. The following is an attempt to share some of the areas of research that suggested themselves.

General Areas of Research

The key questions that guided this research endeavor were looking at education from the student's perspective and the impact of that perception on learning. As this research suggests, students and teachers describing their experiences in the classroom provide a wealth of information that could explain the educational experience in more depth. It also suggests that education does have an effect either positively or negatively on students and teachers. Although this research attempted to shed some light on these two questions, there is still a great deal of information that needs to be uncovered.
Considering education from the student’s perspective seems to be a relatively new approach in educational research. As the review of the literature revealed, very few studies have been conducted that look at the educational experience from the student’s point of view. It is encouraging to realize that some of the more recent research in education (Mealman, 1991, and Weston, 1993) are taking this perspective into account and providing rich avenues for future study. As the students in this research explained, they do have definite perceptions of and reactions to the things that are occurring in the classroom with their fellow classmates, the teacher, and the content. Their perceptions in turn seem to have an effect on what the students get out of an educational experience. Although this particular research was looking at the experience as a whole, future research in this area could focus on any number of student and teacher perceptions of various pieces of the educational enterprise; for example, content, context, teacher, cohort learning, influences on learning. Schubert (1986) would be a valuable resource in examining this area.

Since interpersonal relationships and emotion played such an important role in this study, the affective aspects of learning also present another area for future research. Many of the students in this study had a hard time separating out which aspect of their educational experience was most important to them. In addition, they revealed how
powerfully their emotions had an impact on their cognitive functioning. Since this is consistent with the new research on the brain and learning (Sylwester, 1993/94), it suggests that more studies which focus on the impact of emotion on cognition need to be conducted.

In considering the type of change or learning that results from an educational experience, another area where more research is needed presents itself. According to Mezirow (1991), his theory of transformative learning is not based on any empirical research. From a personal conversation I had with him in September, 1994, he is encouraging more people to investigate and research his theoretical assumptions. Although this research indicated that in the case of at least one student transformative learning is possible according to Mezirow’s theory, the lack of evidence of this type of learning from the majority of the students in my study suggests that more research needs to be done in this area. Because of the lack of evidence of transformative learning in this study, I am interested in finding out why this occurred. Since data collection for this study occurred during the first half of the program, would there have been more evidence of transformative learning if I had continued the research into the later stages of the program? Did the students need more time for this type of learning to develop or were they transforming so rapidly that this research did not capture it? Was there
something that the teachers could have done to foster or enhance this type of learning? Does the student have to be ready for or in a state of readiness for this type of learning? What effect does a student’s personality preference or their level of reflection have on their learning being transformative? Are other changes in understanding or knowledge occurring which are not necessarily transformative in nature? As suggested by Cranton (1994), are students at different levels of transformative learning? Is the change that students experience as a result of an educational experience truly transformative or something else? Can Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning be substantiated? These are just a few of the questions that arose in the course of my own research regarding the idea of change or transformative learning.

Methodological Considerations

As with any research, the method of conducting a study has an effect on the final results that are obtained. With this in mind certain changes in the methodology of this study could result in more generalizable results. The particular areas where I would suggest some methodological modifications are in the design of the study, the subjects used for the study, the courses under investigation, and the environment where the study was conducted.
Design of the Study

The original design of this study was to obtain information from teachers and students through a variety of data sources over a sequence of courses approximately six months in length with the researcher as a participant/observer. Some key questions come to mind with regard to this design. First of all, the length of the study could have been extended to obtain more in-depth information particularly from the students. In talking to these students six months after the study was completed, it was revealed that by the end of the program the cohesiveness of this group as described in my study had begun to disintegrate. Certain student relationships were strengthened while others were strained. In addition, the focus was more on completing the program than on actually learning. Therefore, a lengthening of this study might have revealed more accurate information regarding student learning and relationships. Second, the data sources that were initially conceptualized need to be revised or administered differently so that more useful information can be obtained from them. Although the interviews proved worthwhile, the reflection pieces that were supposed to provide corroborating information were not as useful. Devising a way to encourage the students in particular to complete these pieces would help in this area. One possible way would be to include the reflection piece as a part of...
the student’s class work that would be evaluated by the instructor as well as the researcher. This approach might reveal more in-depth reflection on the student’s experience which could then be used to substantiate the information acquired through the interviews. Finally, a change in the researcher’s role as a participant/observer might have helped provide additional insight into what was actually occurring in the classroom. Since I was only a participant/observer in the two classes that I was teaching, I was unable to actually see for myself some of the situations that the teachers and students described to me in their interviews. Had I been an observer in the class while the teachers and students were interacting, I might have been able to understand more deeply what was meaningful to the students and the teachers. One caution to making this change is that by being an observer in the classroom, I could have influenced in some way the dynamics that were occurring and thus confounded the information that was being provided.

Participants

Since this study was based on only one particular group of students and three of their instructors, it would be valuable to see if the same or similar conclusions could be drawn with other groups of adult students with different instructors. Since the students involved in this study were mainly female, it is possible that the information gained
with its emphasis on relationships could have been viewed as a female perception. Although there is definitely a need for more research on the female perspective in adult education according to Stalker (1996), the perspective of a predominantly male group of students, or of a gender equal mix of students might yield different interpretations. Not only could responses based on gender be examined more closely, but students' interpretations based on ethnic background, age, or personality type could also be sources for additional research. Although my research focused more on the common experiences shared by the students, differences based on the above factors were being suggested by the types of responses I obtained from the students.

Since there were only three instructors with varied backgrounds involved in this study, there were too few participants in this aspect of my research to make any general conclusions. However, it would be interesting to see if other teachers had similar experiences. Weston's (1993) research in elementary schools seems to indicate this possibility. It would also be interesting to see if the interactions of gender, ethnic background, age, and personality style would have an impact on the meaning teachers construct of their experience. Since the teachers involved in this study were all familiar with the non-traditional format and strived to teach in a more discussion based style, examining teachers who were more traditional in
their approach with adult learners might yield some interesting perspectives. Further examination of the impact of different teaching styles on students and student learning seems to be another possible research area.

**Courses**

My research suggested that the students were more focused on the relationships they developed with their classmates and their instructor than on the subject matter of the course. This lack of focus on the subject matter raises some interesting questions. Was the lack of interest due to the specific courses under study or were there other factors influencing the students' perceptions? Since the courses under study were designed to explore human interaction on various levels, did this contribute to the students' interest in relationships and would other courses whose subject matter was more abstract or concrete reveal different perceptions and meanings? Because of the experiential emphasis in the curriculum for each course, were my perceptions of what the students were learning in regard to the subject matter confused with the students' experiences? As suggested in the research by Weston (1993), looking specifically at the students' interpretation of the subject matter and course concepts would provide additional information on what the subject matter and specific concepts meant to them or how they were experiencing those concepts.
Environment

One final area related to methodology would concern the actual location of the class or as Schubert (1986) suggests milieu. The classes in this study were conducted in a hotel conference/seminar room, and the set up of the room was always in a U-shape or square which technically gives more of an opportunity for interaction among the students. By changing the structure of the classroom to a more formal setting, it is possible that the students would react differently to the teacher and to the other students in class and perceive their experience differently as well. Would the students have been as focused on their relationships with their classmates if they did not have direct eye contact with each other? Also would the students have been as concerned about their relationship with the teacher, if the teacher had been situated behind a desk at the front of the room? In essence, what part does environment play in student learning and the interactions that occur in the classroom? Schubert (1986) asks similar questions in regard to milieu and teachers.

Suggestions Regarding Educational Practice

Although this study did not set out to provide prescriptions for educational practice, some interesting insights were revealed that could have an impact on curriculum and faculty development. Depending on how
If curriculum is defined as "intended outcomes, subject matter to be delivered, statements in curriculum documents, or behavioral objectives" (Schubert, 1986, P. 301), then questions involving curriculum development would focus on specific theories, concepts, subject matter and behaviors. Since the students in my study expressed an interest in wanting more depth and more rigor in the subject matter of the courses, it would be advisable for the ABS department to consider ways to incorporate more depth into their courses. In the case of the ABS program, most of the theories and course concepts are in the textbooks, but the philosophy behind the program is that the student is expected to read and understand the theories and concepts and that class time is spent in providing experiences and opportunities for students to interact with the material. More explanation or modeling of how to integrate theory and practice might be a way of changing this student perception. Possibly more instructor references to or discussion of the material in the texts or encouraging the students to critically evaluate what they are reading might help as well.

If, however, curriculum is defined, according to Schubert (1986), in a much broader sense to include everything that could have an impact on learning, then different things need to be taken into consideration. Since
the students in my study continually commented on how much they liked the non-traditional approach to learning and how important their relationship to the other students and to their teacher were to their learning, it would seem valuable to consider ways to enhance those relationships as they relate to student learning. In addition, with emotional issues being more important than cognitive issues to the students in this study, it is possible that emotional issues may be the primary learning that occurs instead of being secondary to cognitive issues. With this in mind educators need to specifically plan for affective learning and may even have to plan for cognitive learning in terms of affective learning.

In regard to faculty development, the major comment that all the teachers in my study made was that they really valued sharing their teaching experiences. By reflecting on their experiences and sharing them with me, these teachers seemed to be growing and changing their approach to their teaching and through this process providing their own faculty development. Reflecting, questioning and sharing teaching experiences seems to be a possible avenue for future faculty development. As part of this reflection process, looking at the classroom experience from the student’s perspective might also be helpful in promoting teacher change. Not only would taking the student’s perspective into consideration contribute to faculty
development, but paying attention to the relationships and interactions that occur in a classroom and the impact they have on teaching and learning would provide valuable insights into the whole educational process.

Impact of Research on Researcher

When I started this research, it was with the idea in mind of exploring an area of education that would help me become a better teacher. The experience of doing this research and the results I obtained have had an influence and impact on much more than just my teaching. Although it has definitely shaped my approach to teaching, this study has also influenced the way I serve as faculty coordinator and the way that I look at research.

As a teacher I am much more aware that the relationship I develop with my students may have more impact on my students than any subject matter that I can present to them. Although I have intuitively sensed the importance of this relationship between teacher and student, I had not realized how much of an influence this relationship could potentially have on student learning. Because some of the students reacted negatively to one of the instructors in my study and had a hard time approaching him as a person, I have attempted as a teacher to make myself more approachable to students, and to match my style of teaching with the demands of the group. In other words, for groups who are not as comfortable with the non-traditional approach, I am trying
to be more structured and traditional or for those who appreciate the non-traditional approach, I am trying to be more relaxed and student focused. Since my teacher training focused on the lecture method, yet I value experiential learning, I have relied heavily on my background in speech/communication and theatre to create a balance between these two styles. It seems that creating a balance between these two approaches might be the best way to accommodate a wide variety of students, and still be congruent with my values and expertise.

Another thing that has changed in my teaching is an increase in my appreciation of and admiration for the tenets of adult education. Where before I questioned the curriculum and exercises presented in the ABS program, I now have a deeper understanding and awareness of how that curriculum and the activities associated with it are actually grounded in the theories of adult learning with their focus on experiential and group learning. As a result, I am incorporating more experientially based learning activities into my teaching. Since the students in my study valued the knowledge gained from their classmates and the differing experiences and perspectives those classmates provided, I am also encouraging more group interaction and allowing for more student input into classroom activities. Although I am much more appreciative of adult education methods, I have encountered a dilemma.
with some of the specific behavioral objectives outlined in
the ABS instructor guides and with some of the suggestions
of how to present the subject matter. Since the students in
my study expressed a strong desire for more rigorous subject
matter, I am attempting to find ways to provide this, such
as making more references to the text or by encouraging
critical examination of the text or theories presented.

In my role as faculty coordinator, I am much more
cautious in my choice of instructors, and much more aware of
the value of sharing classroom experiences with these
instructors. Because of the varied student reactions to the
instructors in my study, I am trying to select instructors
for future courses whose teaching styles match more with the
students' expectations. By doing so I am hopefully
alleviating any negative impact that a teacher or their
style might have on student learning. The comment made by
all of the instructors in the study that they valued sharing
their teaching experiences with me really had a profound
impact on me. In wondering why we as teachers don't share
more of our experiences, I began to realize that we are
often afraid to share particularly negative experiences for
fear of being judged, and we probably don't see the value in
sharing our experiences and therefore don't allow time to do
so. Because of the impact of that specific teacher comment,
I am exerting more effort to talk to adjunct instructors on
an individual basis about their teaching experiences and am
working on a faculty development session that would provide a forum for sharing classroom experiences.

Aside from having an impact on my teaching and faculty coordinating, this study has changed my view of research. Research has always produced a decidedly negative reaction in me, possibly due to the fact that my first exposure to it was in the late 1960's when the research paradigm was decidedly quantitative and behavioristic in nature, but I am now recognizing the value of investigating what is happening in the classroom and that my students are a rich resource in providing information on what learning means to them. Where before I couldn't find any researchable questions, I am now filled with questions about all kinds of things that impact learning. My curiosity is now whetted, and instead of seeing research as an arduous, required task and another hoop to jump through, I am beginning to see research as it really should be viewed as a way of pursuing life long learning.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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APPENDIX A

Data Collection Time Line
### Dissertation Time-Line

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APPENDIX B

Examples of Data Sources

I. Student Sources of Information

Permission form
Reflection Pieces
Interview questions

II. Teacher Sources of Information

Instructions
Reflection pieces
Interview question
Standardized Instructional Evaluation Form
STUDENT INFORMATION

Your particular group has been selected as part of a research project to provide information about your learning experiences in the ABS program and what they mean to you. The information you provide will not affect the evaluation of your performance in the program and will be kept confidential. Your participation in this project is voluntary and will involve providing some additional feedback in the form of brief interviews (one per course) and periodic written reflections on your experiences in each course. Since a goal of this project is improving the ABS program, your honest responses, opinions, and feedback are vital.

I have read the above description of the research project and it has been explained to me. I am willing to participate in this project.

__________________________  __________________________
Signature                   Date
REFLECTIONS

Please keep the following questions in mind when reflecting on each course.

1. How do you feel the course went? What was significant or important about the course? Why?

2. How would you describe the tenor or tone of the class during this course? What do you think the students' would say about this course?

3. What do you think you have learned about yourself, the group, the subject and the teacher through this course?
SAMPLE STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What does it mean to you to be in this class?
2. What was your reaction to the other students?
3. What was your reaction to the teacher?
4. What was your reaction to the course?
5. What was your reaction to the assignments?
6. What things do you think affect your learning?
7. What would facilitate your learning?
8. What does education mean to you?
I am delighted that you will be participating in the research study I am conducting as part of my dissertation. As a participant I need your help in obtaining some of the information I will be analyzing.

1. Please complete the following inventories and return to me prior to our second interview.
   
   Keirsey Temperament Sorter
   Learning Style Inventory
   Representational System Bias Test
   Thomas-Kilman Conflict Mode

2. Be available for 3 one hour interviews: prior to teaching the module, during the module and after the module has been completed.

3. Keep a journal of your experience teaching this group with an entry for each class session. See attached form for guidelines.

4. Collect and copy student journals that you assign, preferably with your comments, before returning them to students. Please keep track of the number of copies and I will reimburse you for the copy costs.
GUIDELINES FOR INSTRUCTOR JOURNAL

Please keep the following questions in mind when reflecting on each class session.

1. How do you feel about how class went tonight? What was significant or important about tonight’s class session? Why?

2. What was going through your mind before, during and after class?

3. How would you describe the tenor or tone of the class tonight? What do you think the students’ would say about class tonight?
SAMPLE INSTRUCTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The first interview will be conducted prior to the first night of class and will include questions like the following:

What does teaching mean to you?
What does teaching in this program and this course mean to you?
What are your expectations of what will happen in class?
What do you think will be some of the students’ reactions to this class?
What do you want to know about the students in this class and why?
How does knowing this information affect the way you teach?

The second interview will be conducted after the first night of class and will include some of the following questions:

What happened in class?
How does it match with your expectations of yourself as a teacher, the instruction, and the students?
What were the students’ reactions to class? to you? to the material?
How will this affect your teaching of future class sessions?
How do you see (know about, feel about) your students now?
What are your expectations for the rest of the class sessions?

The third interview will be conducted after the class has been completed and will look at some of the following questions:

What did it mean to you to teach this class and these students?
What do you (feel, think, see) these students learned from this class?
What things would you have done differently in teaching this group of students?
What do you think had the most meaning for these students?
INSTRUCTIONAL EVALUATION FORM

Academic Term __________ Year ____________ Campus/Extension Location __________
Course Number ______ Computer Index Number ______ Instructor ______

Directions: Please use a number 2 pencil to complete this form. Respond to each statement by darkening in the box which most closely indicates your opinion of the instructor and course.

Proper Marks Improper Marks

SA = Strongly Agree  A = Agree  U = Undecided  D = Disagree  SD = Strongly Disagree  Leave Blank if Does Not Apply

I. The Instructor:
1. knew the subject matter ........................................................... [SA A U D SD]
2. communicated the subject matter ........................................... [SA A U D SD]
3. was receptive to student needs ............................................... [SA A U D SD]
4. encouraged student participation ........................................... [SA A U D SD]
5. was well prepared ................................................................... [SA A U D SD]
6. was enthusiastic about the subject ......................................... [SA A U D SD]
7. used materials that were relevant to understanding the subject matter .......... [SA A U D SD]
8. used a variety of appropriate instructional strategies ................. [SA A U D SD]

II. The Course:
9. achieved its stated objectives ................................................. [SA A U D SD]
10. reference and supporting materials were available to students ....... [SA A U D SD]
11. content reflected current knowledge and research ................. [SA A U D SD]
12. increased my knowledge and expertise .................................. [SA A U D SD]
13. challenged me ...................................................................... [SA A U D SD]

III. Respond to the following statements concerning the instructor's evaluation of student performance:
14. Methods used to evaluate student performance were clearly communicated ........................................ [SA A U D SD]
15. Methods of evaluation were appropriate for the subject matter ...................................................................... [SA A U D SD]
16. Graded assignments were returned in a reasonable period of time ................................................................. [SA A U D SD]
17. Instructor gave useful comments and feedback on assignments ................................................................. [SA A U D SD]
18. Evaluation was representative of the course material .......... [SA A U D SD]
19. Grading was fair and consistent ............................................ [SA A U D SD]
20. Adequate opportunity was given for me to demonstrate my knowledge ......................................................... [SA A U D SD]

IV. Respond to the following open-ended questions:
1. List the strengths of this course:

2. List those things you think would most improve the course:

3. Other comments:

Please use the back for additional space.
APPENDIX C
Course Objectives
Course Objectives

1. Students will provide a working definition of the following terms:
   - Group (Text: p. 3)
   - Norms (Text: pp. 103-104)
   - Task (Text: pp. 109-111)
   - Groupthink (Text: pp. 134-135)
   - Conflict (Text: pp. 117-118)
   - Synergistic Decision Making (Desert Survival Problem)

2. Students will list and explain the five stages of group development.
   (Text: pp. 59-63)

3. Students will explain the basic steps in group decision making.
   (Desert Survival Exercise)

4. Students will explain the steps involved in problem solving.
   (Text: Chapter 6)

5. Students will identify the five steps in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Human Needs. (Text: pp. 30-31)

6. Students will become familiar with group problem solving techniques, processes and applications.

7. Students will explain various sources/causes of conflict.

8. Students will examine their own organizations’ conflict-management climate.

9. Students will consider and identify the most commonly used conflict management strategy in their organization.
10. Students will discuss purposes, types, and characteristics of common work-related meetings.

11. Students will identify constructive behaviors of members and leaders of problem solving groups.

12. Students will describe procedures for facilitating work of committees.

13. Students will observe and analyze effective process and task behaviors in a simulated committee exercise.

14. Students will synthesize and reinforce the learning from sessions one through four.
Course Objectives

1. Students will practice verbal and nonverbal communication.

2. Students will practice listening and attending skills.

3. Students will practice giving constructive feedback.

4. Students will understand and apply selected theorists' approaches to building interpersonal relationships, including Carl Rogers, Martin Buber, and Leo Buscaglia.

5. Students will identify and articulate relational themes in media.
Course Objectives

This course will give students the opportunity to explore and understand the concepts of culture, ethnicity, race, and diversity. The course will assist students in exploring the extent to which their values and behaviors are shaped by their own cultural context.

- Students will analyze the influence that culture has had on their own lives.
- Students will examine cultural differences as a source of intergroup conflict.
- Students will examine language and communication difficulties as a source of cultural differences.
- Students will explore the concept of synergistic decision making as a source of utilizing cultural differences.