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The Struggles of Mentoring:
Just Where Do You Think You're Going?

Katharine S. Childs

A Thesis

in

The Department

of

Education

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts at

Concordia University

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ABSTRACT

The Struggles of Mentoring: Just Where Do You Think You're Going?

Katharine S. Childs

This thesis is a reflective inquiry into my practice as a mentor working with a population of young adults enrolled in a full-time academic program of studies in an adult education center. Although there has been research on mentoring adults who return to school in a university or college setting, very little appears in the research literature about mentoring adolescent and younger adult students returning to school in an adult education program set in a high school environment. This thesis begins to address this gap by presenting a detailed description that captures some of the essence of my practice working with young adults.

In this self-study, I describe, examine and reflect on myself as a mentor, using narrative accounts to illustrate my attempts to develop and expand certain mentoring skills and to align my practice more fully with my values. Through the use of stories of my practice infused with poetry and various image texts, I illustrate the use of multi-modal representations as a possible means of further enhancing, expanding, and articulating educational practices (Harris, 1981). This inquiry suggests that a thoughtful program of mentoring integrated into an academic setting can be a viable and empowering form of education for students from disaffected or marginalized populations. Mentoring is depicted as a moral

endeavor and a careful mode of listening. Vision or dreams, a sense of purpose, goal setting, faith in one's students, perseverance, and an awareness of the connection of joy and sorrow are central to this analysis of mentoring

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Kedrin and Pierre, whose love and support make me compassionately human,

...and to Jamie, whose spirit makes me fearless.

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CHAPTER ONE

Just Where Do You Think You're Going?: The Inquiry Begins

SUDDeNlY

Suddenly, the truth is out – and nothing
is the same. You are
the last surprise, I am
a moose come too far south,
puzzled by speeding cars and villages.
Too late, too late, I try to run
through snowy fields on melting legs.

"SUddeNlY"
watercolor
- ksc, 2000

Image of Mentoring 1.

"Just where do you think you're going?"...

It had been one of those days. My alarm hadn't gone off, and traffic on the Montreal side of the bridge had been at its painful slowest, increasing my hour-long drive to work by another good half-hour. The normally pleasant feeling that I usually had when I got out of my car and walked into the Adult Education Center had been replaced by one of annoyance and dread. I really wasn't looking forward to beginning that school day.

Opening the door to my classroom, I was pleased to note that I wasn't too terribly late for class and that most of the people present didn't appear to have noticed that I hadn't been there. I sighed inwardly in relief: many of those 30 "adult" learners in my Level IV/V English class seemed to need my continual presence to stay motivated, and some simply weren't too sure of what to do unless I was there to help. Others didn't give the slightest indication that they cared one way or the other. When I was there, I often felt as if I were expending most of my energies just trying to keep all these people on track and working. It was a draining, daunting task.

In actual fact, most of the learners in my class weren't really adults, per se, but 16-18 years olds transferred over from the "regular" sector. On days like this, the majority of them really seemed to need a "kick start" to get them to work. I had often noticed just how passive, unmotivated and generally unconcerned and uninvolved they were. Luckily enough for me, though, today some members of the class actually appeared to be quite busy.

As I was hanging up my coat, I happened to notice one young individual who seemed to be quietly making for the classroom door...

"Just where do you think you're going?" I demanded.
"Uh--to the bathroom," he responded sheepishly...

I couldn't believe the words that I'd heard coming out of my mouth. I mean, I had always prided myself on being a responsive, sensitive adult educator, so why did this one sentence stop me cold? What was it? Was it the words? the tone of my voice? – or was it where it had come from?...

"Just where do you think you're going?"...

Those words, and the reaction that I had to them, made me realize that I had just crossed over some sort of invisible line...not his line, but the line that I had drawn for myself. It was at that precise moment that I knew I was really in trouble – as an educator and as a fellow learner, but most importantly, as a human being.

As an adult educator, I touted all the accepted principles of working with adults, used all the right words and had studied the methods until I had the techniques down pat. I was quite pleased with myself and the way in which I could handle any number of subjects, teaching several of them at once to varying numbers of students, juggling the different levels and assignments with practiced effortlessness.

"Just where do you think you're going?"...

In that one moment, a number of things came crashing into my consciousness, breaking through years and years of established patterns. In that one most excruciatingly lucid moment, it became painfully clear that what had happened could well be the end of teaching for me, because I had really had it. I was heartsick and frustrated as an educator.

Just where did I think I was going?

"Just where do you think you're going?"...

Now, even after three years, there are times that I still hear it. It has an uncanny ability to find me no matter where I am. It seeks me out in even the most ordinary times and places. I awake from a restless, dream-riddled night, and there it is, reverberating in my ears. It echoes down long hallways as I walk. I hear it in the silences. Snatches of it sometimes catch me off-guard when I'm talking to others, or when I first flip on the car radio. It pursues me relentlessly. It is one of those very few things that I cannot totally put behind me, cannot really escape, am unable to erase.

"Once upon a time, there was a woman who discovered she had turned into the wrong person" (p. 1). This is how Anne Tyler (2001) begins her novel *Back When We Were Grownups*. Like the main character, Beck Davitch, I, too, late in life found out to my dismay that I had turned into someone else, that I had become the wrong mentor. This is not to say that I was a bad mentor, but rather that I had somehow slightly changed direction. The reason that I had gone into the teaching profession and from there into mentoring was because I loved learning and helping others learn. I don't think that I've ever really lost that love totally, but somehow over the years I watched as a part of the idealistic "me" went away. She was replaced by someone who felt more or less the same way, but was more "practical" about it – someone who was willing to let some of the

students go on in school without trying to engage them in actual, meaningful conversations and dialogue.

The problem as I came to see it was not necessarily how I got to this spot in my life, but one of how I could get back home to my hearth fire...if indeed I could. I had come to that point in my life and in my mentoring where real action was needed. I couldn't go on the way I had been. In fact, I was on the brink of resigning and leaving the profession altogether.

"Just where do you think you're going?"...

Nobody trips over mountains. It's the little stones – the pebbles – that cause us to stumble and slip. It is the memory of that one tiny moment – an entire incident of no more than perhaps 35 seconds – that still keeps me contrite and eager to confront the contradictions and the complacencies in my practice as an mentor. It is this gap, this tension, between my intentions and my actions as a mentor that I look to narrow as I strive to come face to face with the questions "What is it that I do and how can I live my values?".

This is a thesis about my self-study as a mentor in Adult Education. It is a chronicle of my reflective practice and my efforts to improve what it is I do. I seek to make my practice more congruent with my core values.

Contextualizing the Situation: Background Information

I have been working for the Adult Education Services in the Eastern Townships of Quebec for 20 years as an adult educator, and for the last three of

those years as a mentor as well as a teacher. (I will explain mentoring a little further on.) For over twenty-five years, this institution has supported the lifelong learning process of individuals, organizations and communities alike by providing curriculum based programs, community animation, human resource development, and training and consulting services. As a part of these services, the Adult Education Center offers full-time and part-time academic programs to those adults wishing to complete their studies leading to the high school diploma (DES) or the professional vocational diploma programs (DEP). These programs are open as well to people who wish to upgrade their academic credentials.

Adult Education Services offers a supportive environment in which people are welcomed and valued. Attracted from numerous small communities in the surrounding areas, learners come from diverse social and economic backgrounds, and possess a variety of life experiences. Yet, despite the diversity of its clientele, motivation, commitment, and behavior have never been real problems in the Adult Education system – at least until recently.

In previous decades, our adult student population consisted mainly of adults whose average age was above twenty years of age, people who already had at least a few years out of school, out in the world. Most of these students were highly motivated, enthusiastic, and determined to get their high school leaving diplomas. In comparison with younger high school drop outs, the majority of our adult education students were older, more experienced people who had come to the realization that they needed an education to get ahead, or to get a

better paying job. This group also included those who returned to school for other reasons: perhaps in order to finish off something in their lives, to prove something to themselves, or even to become better role models for their children.

Learning on one's own requires a number of learning management and personal skills that not everyone acquires automatically. Accordingly, an adult educator's job usually revolves around trying to *"...gradually equip those learners with the skills, self-concept, and motivation necessary to pursue learning in a more self-directed manner*" (Grow, 1991, p. 215). And yet, some of the biggest "headaches" that I experienced with my students usually centered around their extreme enthusiasm for learning and their insistence that they needed to learn everything to the best of their ability. In fact, it was often difficult to get the greater majority of my mature students to understand or to accept the fact that, not only didn't I expect them to get perfect scores all the time, but that they needn't demand it of themselves. They seemed to be even more baffled to discover that I didn't feel that schoolwork should take up 100% of their spare time!

Sadly, the situation described above is no longer the norm. In the past three to five years, there has been a tremendous influx of 16-18 year old students into the adult education sector, students who are young enough to stay in the regular system but who have consciously chosen to enroll in our system. The majority of these younger adults appear to be highly dependent on teachers to help them with their learning. Because of that, they have radically different needs and seem to require a completely different approach than the slightly older/more experienced adults I was used to teaching. My experience in working

with these younger students who have come to adult education directly from the regular public school system leads me to believe that a great many of them are uninterested and unengaged in their own learning. In fact, I have sometimes felt as if I care more about their education than they do. This saddens and puzzles me.

My day-to-day teaching can be quite frustrating, especially early in the school year. Students don't seem to be able to finish the schoolwork they have been assigned – and the quality of work that they produce is generally not the kind of exciting work that I feel they are capable of doing. They seem too tacitly accepting and passive in the classroom, almost as if it were part and parcel of the learning process for them. Grow (1989), finds this dependency "...*a product of culture, upbringing, and most of all—the public education system*", contending that "...*students do not naturally arrive at high school or college heavily dependent upon teachers. They become that way as a result of years of dependency training*" (p. 219).

I have always believed that the more active and autonomous learners become in the learning process and the more that they take responsibility for the decisions regarding their own learning, the more meaningful their learning becomes and, consequently, the more motivated learners become. As well, when students take greater control over their own learning – through goal setting, recording/logging their own personal progress, and making individual choices about how, what, and even when they are to learn something – their confidence as learners improves and more self-directed learning takes place.

The literature about adult learning seems to support the above statement. In order for students to feel confident about their own abilities as learners, Wlodkowski (1985) suggests that one of the most important strategies to help adults develop positive attitudes toward learning is to *promote the learner's personal control of the context of learning* (p. 92). Learners, he maintains,

> ...*must realize that it is their own behavior that is most responsible for their learning. This means that they must feel a sense of personal causation in the process of learning – that they mainly control how, what, and when they learn...* (ibid.)

An additional benefit of a more autonomous approach to learning may be improved self-concept through increased academic achievement. When speaking about adults and self-directed learning, Wlodkowski (1985) points out that

> ...*Numerous researchers have found that self-concept is positively related to academic achievement–the higher the self-concept, the better the odds that the person will do well on academic tasks and vice versa...* (p.89)

In theory, at least, the adult education environment seems to be an ideal place to support a more autonomous style of learning. Classes at the Center meet for approximately 2 3/4 hours a session – for a total of five and a half (5 ½) hours of instruction a day. For the most part, students work on individualized modules – learning at their own rate and consulting the teacher if and when they need help. This is in sharp contrast to the teacher-taught classes that are the norm in high schools. Tests are not summative (except where required by the government), but are designed for each unit/module, and may be taken whenever learners have completed the work and feel that they are ready to take

a test. What this means is that individuals can accomplish as much – or as little – in a subject as they wish. The only limits to their learning seem to depend on the students as individuals – on their personal learning styles, their effort, and their capacity for learning.

And yet, despite all these opportunities, my younger adults in the Center didn't seem to be becoming any more motivated or self-directed. I wondered what was going wrong in my classroom. Most specifically, I asked myself if there was a way that I as a mentor could help to improve learners' skills, to enable them to take an active role in their learning, to empower them to become more successful, functioning members of our system. Was there something I could do? Was I actually promoting the kind of learning that I thought I was? Just where did I think I was going?

This investigation of my own practice grew from that question and the issues around it. I began to wonder if the problem lay not in my students, but in myself. I felt my beliefs were being denied somehow in my practice. I was what Jack Whitehead (1993) refers to as a "living contradiction" (p. 7). As we shall see later, finding out the answers to some of the questions I had involved more than just mere soul-searching.

Mentoring In Our Center

Mentoring is part and parcel of our program and an integral part of our vision at the adult education center in which I work. The purpose of the mentoring system in our center is to provide adult education students with the opportunity to

meet one-on-one with a staff member on a regular basis in order to encourage students in the learning process and to help them attain their academic goals "*as defined in their Training Profile*" (Adult Education Services, 1998, p. 9). This mentoring system was initially implemented in the 1997-98 academic year to provide a structure and a process by which adults could experience the individual growth and success which would enable them to find their own place in society as productive, self-empowered citizens.

In addition to facilitating individual academic growth, the mentoring program also fosters a sense of community and belonging while promoting a vision of personal excellence in a safe and secure environment. All full-time students in Adult Education Services who attend classes at our center are assigned mentors as part of the usual course of events, and we recommend that part-time students also have mentors.

Each member of the teaching staff takes part in this system as a mentor, usually having between 8-10 learners to mentor (mentees), and are assigned a specific day and time in which to see those students. Whenever possible, in order to make the mentoring process that much more personalized, these mentees also take at least one academic course with their mentor. In this way, they interact with each other on a more regular basis, getting to know each other better while establishing a good working relationship. All mentees, then, take part in an academic program of studies designed to enable them to get the prerequisites necessary to enter into a DEP or other professional program, to

obtain their DES /high school leaving certificate, or to continue on to further their studies in CEGEP or at university.

Mentees are seen at least once a month, although mentors usually make appointments to see these people more often, trying to arrange meetings on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. During the usual course of a mentoring session, mentor and mentee review the progress made since their last session, by checking the mentee's "Progress Chart, part 1" (Figure I).

PROGRESS CHART: part I   Name: Page:

Short Term Educational Goal_____
Long Term Educational Goal_____
Vocational Goal_____

_____

Goal for the year_____
          _____
          _____
          _____
          _____

Figure I. Progress Chart, part 1

If the mentee's progress is on track – that is, aligned with his stated goals – discussion often centers on the student's more distant goals and/or his personal "vision". The mentor not only provides a "listening ear", but also provides both support and challenge to help mentees accomplish their goals,

often helping them chart a "road map" of choices to make. Frequently, non-academic goals are discussed as well.

In order to facilitate this essential process, the AES staff developed something called the "Personal Planning Portfolio" (Morgan and Bleser, 1998), a three-ring binder equipped with plastic sleeves and pockets especially designed to hold all the important papers learners might need: their up-to-date schedules, their Training Profiles (papers containing information on credits earned towards the degree or diploma sought, as well as pertinent information on the learner's individualized long-term, short-term and vocational goals), copies of Progress Charts, and places to file and organize any other papers that might be necessary for their personal "success" in our Adult Learning Center.

Mentees usually stay with the same mentor to whom they were originally assigned throughout their program, unless one or both feel that a change might be needed. This means that most of my mentees and I have been together for a couple of years. As well, even though several of my mentees graduate every year, new mentees are assigned as the need or opportunity arises, thereby ensuring that there is always a fairly uniform size to our mentoring groups. The number of mentees assigned to me usually ranges from 10-14 individuals, most of whom I see at least three times a month (but usually more often) in individual mentoring sessions that last approximately half an hour a session. Occasionally, we meet in whole group sessions.

My mentees, as a rule, are quite representative of the students in our center, and reflect the demographic reality of adult education within the province

of Quebec: the majority of them are between 17 and 20 years of age, and, for the most part, are female. Most of them have been less than successful in the regular academic sector. In fact, most attended our local high school before enrolling in the Adult Education sector and have grown up in the surrounding area. Because mentees are normally assigned to those mentors who teach them at least one course and thereby see them at least once a week, my mentoring groups, usually consist of individuals in the upper levels of English (Secondary IV and V) since that is the subject I teach. Generally speaking, the people who are my mentees, then, are considered academically capable of completing their stated short-term goals within a year or two.

Self-study: A Look At The Professional Dream

"Just where do you think you're going?"...

Malcolm Knowles (1975) speaks of the truly artistic teacher as being one who

> *...perceives the focus of responsibility for learning to be in the learner; he conscientiously suppresses his own compulsion to teach what he knows his students ought to learn in favor of helping his students learn for themselves what they want to learn.*
> *(p. 56)*

Similarly, Maxine Greene (1978) exhorts teachers to artistic behavior, which she describes as an open, wide-awake encounter with students and themselves. Stressing the connection between cognitive clarity, critical questioning, and "wide-awakeness", she maintains that this type of encounter can play a major role in liberating and arousing a sense of connection, of

significance, and even of wonder in individuals toward learning. Indeed, she strongly asserts that "...*wide-awakeness ought to accompany every effort made to initiate persons into any form of life or academic discipline*" (p. 47).

I believe that this type of "artistic" attitude is not restricted solely to teaching, but actually encompasses all of us who would help others learn. As a mentor, I have felt compelled to respond to this challenge by trying to become the best mentor I am capable of becoming, conscientiously choosing to focus on the sanctity and dignity of human life and the right of every human being to freedom and well-being as those characteristics which should be manifested in education and in my practice.

Becoming a "wide-awake" and "artistic" mentor is part of what I call my professional vision or dream. The dream is a deep, driving force within me, embracing a vision of the sort of education that mentoring can help to enhance – an education which facilitates and affirms personal as well as academic growth, and where growth is seen not as a process of "being shaped", but as a process of becoming (Knowles, 1990). I believe very strongly in the type of mentor I would like to be, in a mentor who can help others become more functioning, self-directed, and autonomous in their learning and growth – a mentor who tries to fully live out and model her values in a conscious and respectful fashion. Accordingly, in undertaking the work on which this thesis rests, I have become a teacher researcher, deliberately choosing to become a reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983) in an effort to live out my dream.

As its popularity has increased, numerous and varying definitions of teacher research have appeared in the literature (cf. McNiff, 1988, 1993;

Hamilton, 1998; Whitehead, 1993). By and large, teacher research is a practitioner-driven, critical problem solving strategy conducted in a systematic manner. The primary thrusts of teacher research involve the use of reflection, collection, enaction, evaluation, and validation (Eames, 1988) and include

- an awareness and an acknowledgement that there is a need to reflect on both teaching and learning;

- a need to act upon that critical reflection;

- a use of some sort of framework by which to structure reflective questions and to enable a systematic collection and analysis of data;

- an evaluation and assessment of any ensuing changes to practice;

- a belief that such work should be shared in a public arena.

(Ritchie & Wilson, 2000; Elliot, 1994; McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996).

Self-study is one of the most challenging and increasingly popular approaches within the teacher research movement. Palmer (1998) clarifies some of the attraction that this strategy may hold for teacher researchers when he asserts that the act of investigating oneself is important and valuable work – work which is at the heart of education and the educative interaction:

> The work required to "know thyself" is neither selfish nor narcissistic. Whatever self-knowledge we attain as teachers will serve our students and our scholarship well. Good teaching requires self-knowledge; it is a secret hidden in plain sight.
>
> (p. 3)

Self-study is understood to mean research by teachers who "systematically bring to bear...their past experiences, understandings, scholarly

perspectives, and theoretical frames to make sense of the experiences within which they are engaged...data are collected from and about the self to promote self-development and change" (Hamilton, 1998, p. 111). Practitioners study their own practice through the lens of their personal beliefs and values by adopting a form of autobiography or auto-ethnography (Cole & Knowles, 1995) with the intention of aligning their practice more closely with their values. Bullough & Pinnegar (2001) point out that self-study is challenging and delicate work, chiefly because it

> *...does not focus on the self per se but on the space between self and the practice engaged in. There is always a tension between those two elements, self and the arena of practice, between self in relation to practice and the others who share the practice setting* (p. 15)

With the teacher's values at the center, such work is fundamentally moral; therefore, negotiating the often precarious and disruptive balance between the way that private experience can inform public theory (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Brooks, 1992) is essential to acquiring the additional knowledge and understanding involved in the dynamics of "taking it forward" (Whitehead, personal communication, July, 1999). This commitment to improve – as opposed to simply change – professional practice may involve the formation of what Whitehead (1993) refers to as a "living educational theory", an organic and ever evolving account of the ways in which practitioners seek *"to live (their) values more fully in (their) practice"* (p.8).

Becoming reflective practitioners – teacher researchers – involves a

process of on-going critical reflection and self-study, involving an in-depth look at our experiences and ourselves. Our interpretations of experience are shaped by our assumptions, by our biases, by our own worldviews. In the same way, those assumptions and beliefs shape our decisions and our responses. Any investigation into one's own practice should, therefore, be an account of uncovered assumptions and of on-going attempts to live up to one's professed beliefs.

"Just where do you think you're going?"...

Spurred into action by the critical incident related at the beginning of this chapter, in the days immediately following it, I cast about for a person or a place where I could get some advice and help with the questions I had about my mentoring practice. As luck would have it, a nearby university was offering a weekend workshop with Jack Whitehead from Bath University. Although I had heard nothing about him at the time, the description of the workshop sounded promising, so I enrolled. My voyage into myself – the beginnings of this self-study – began that very next weekend...on September 19, 1998, to be precise. Had I known then just how much my entire personal and professional life would change as a result of that one serendipitous moment of signing up for a workshop, perhaps I wouldn't have done anything at all. Some things, though, are simply meant to be.

Jack's workshop led directly into a three-credit graduate course on action research. Approximately a week later, there I was, sitting in the midst of a group of fellow classmates, of people I had just met, wrestling with trying to formulate

research questions and value statements. Through hard work and systematic reflection, I finally came to the conclusion that my belief system rested on four main values, values that I felt were core to who I was as a mentor and as a person. Putting those ideals and values into words and onto paper and critically reflecting on them was to touch and shape my life and my mentoring in very significant ways. The core values with which I began my self-study were the following (Childs, 1999a):

(1)   I believe that teachers' mindsets or beliefs about students become self-fulfilling. Because I strongly believe that the adult educator's job is to "transform" as much as it is to "inform", I believe teachers must change their mindsets in order to be able to effect changes in students' mindsets. Therefore, as an adult educator, I believe in treating every student I have not simply as he or she is, but as he or she *will be* – as a functioning, capable adult (Phillips, 1997).

(2)   I believe that success is the greatest motivator there is. Furthermore, I believe that, although many students may view academic progress as "success", there are other ways of becoming successful. I see my mandate as helping my students to become successful human beings according to their own definition.

(3)   I believe that each one of us holds the keys to what it is that we truly want to learn and how we can best do that – and that we can all learn how to design and direct our own learning. All students are capable of growth – and are

capable of moving from a type of learning which is solely teacher-directed to a more autonomous and self-directed learning style.

(4) I believe in the infallibility and grandeur of the human spirit and soul, and in its ability to fly and soar...and I would somehow like to be able to nurture and support that spirituality in all people that I touch.

As a teacher researcher, I soon realized that I must continually explore and examine my beliefs and mentoring practices in an effort to determine if I am, indeed, living out my values or whether I am too much of a "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 1993) Even after completing this inquiry, I see that I will ever need to re-think assumptions, and constantly re-examine my practice in order to become more like the mentor that I want and need to be, transforming myself and what it is that I do to correspond more closely with that acknowledged ideal.

In an attempt to improve my practice as a mentor, I have constantly asked myself how I could help my mentees to grow academically and personally so that they could shape and live their lives purposefully. This inquiry examines how I live my values as a mentor and explores whether and how those same values affect the way in which I mentor. This in turn has prompted me to consider the deeper personal questions of "Exactly who am I as a mentor?" and "Why am I who I am as a mentor?" (Rossiter, 1999; Whitehead, personal communication, July 23, 2000; Childs & Fletcher, 2000)

This thesis, then, takes seriously my self-taunt *"Just where do you think you're going?"* It investigates my self-journey by looking at what it is I do in an attempt to determine if I am, indeed, living certain of my values through my practice. I will also examine how this self-knowledge helps me to empower others to develop

their own sense of who they are.

A self-journey is a curious thing. Of necessity you end up carrying all of your personal emotional baggage with you, ignoring experienced travelers' counsel to travel light, to pack only the "essentials". Yet, for each one of us, those "essentials" are different – which is just one of the many reasons why explorations like these are so interesting. Although journeys of this nature can be exhilarating, they are also quite confusing, primarily because there is no single route that one can take to get to the destination, no map or well-defined road in sight.

Gathering Material for Self-study: Data collection

In order to critically reflect on myself as a mentor, I realized that I needed to find a way to construct and examine a multi-layered and representative picture of my day-to-day mentoring practice as I could. Consequently, over the course of the three years that I have been working as a mentor, I have systematically gathered data to reflect various aspects of the mentoring I do and to depict the mentees I work with.

The first decision I made about data collection was to video tape of all of my mentoring sessions. In addition, I decided to keep a comprehensive daily journal in which I would record my feelings and observations about mentoring and my impressions of each mentee and the way I perceived our relationship developing. Much of this material – which includes over 126 six-hour long videocassettes and six 3-ring binders – has been instrumental in helping me tell my own and my mentees' stories.

In addition, I took numerous photographs and collected samples of the work that my mentees have produced during our sessions together in order to demonstrate and examine the types of activities that we have done. These student activities include value statements, individualized learner visualizations of goal achievement, reflections and affirmations, mandalas, collages, mind maps, treasure charts, body image drawings, goal setting sheets, interviews, questionnaire responses, journals, personal correspondence, and guided imagery statements. Thus, to summarize, the database includes a variety of forms – audio and video taped segments, photographs, visual art, and various types of written texts – all of which have provided me with valuable sources of insight and have stimulated critical reflection. The chart below (Figure II) looks at the types of data collected and the methods I used to collect them.

DATA	METHOD OF COLLECTION
1. Learner value statements which answer the question "What do you value?"	Video tape the individual mentoring sessions. Have learners write their value statements. My written responses to them.
2. Individual learner "visualized goal achievement"	Take 2 Polaroid pictures for instant shots (one for learners and one for me). Take additional pictures (not Polaroids). Video tape these sessions if possible.
3. Relaxation techniques for guided imagery.	Video tape the sessions. Ask learners to journal and reflect on the experience.
4. Learning how to visualize – visualization/imagery practice	Video tape the sessions.
5. Learner object or symbol representing their goal or themselves.	Take pictures. Video or audio tape discussions centering on choice of symbols.
6. Learner affirmations.	Mentor-learner list of possible affirmations. Video tape mentoring sessions in which this occurs. Learner edited list of affirmations. Copies of resulting audiotapes made from lists.
7. Learner reflections on the visualization process.	Journal writing. Written responses and letters to me as mentor. Questionnaire responses.
8. My reflections on my own effectiveness as a mentor and an educator in facilitating goal-setting through imagery.	My research diary. Notes I made following discussions with other teachers and colleagues. Audio taped discussions with colleagues.
9. Mentoring sessions and interviews with learners.	Video tape all mentoring sessions and interviews.
10. Learner-devised and produced ways of motivating themselves.	Photograph and video tape their presentations of these items and the resulting discussions.

Figure II. Data collection chart

Multi-modal Representation

In presenting this thesis as an account of my mentoring framed as a self-study, I relate stories of my practice that illustrate my attempts to develop and expand certain mentoring skills and to align myself more fully with my values in interaction with my students. But I do not limit myself to a narrative form. This thesis also includes my reflection on the essence of mentoring and self-study as a series of poems and drawings – "theoretical statements" (Weber, personal communication, February, 2001) that I have labeled "Images of Mentoring 1-7". In other words, I have used poetry and visual image texts in combination with narrative vignettes to more fully represent and theorize my experience.

Archibald, Chamberlain, & Gerrits (2000) maintain that "...*moving beyond a written-word-only approach* [provides]...*a rich interpretive framework to examine and reflect upon the professional Self...*[which becomes] *an even richer experience when more than just the written word is a part of self-study*" (p. 15). In my efforts to become a "wide-awake" and artistic mentor, I have worked hard at exploring how I can best articulate the intuitive connections and the subtleties that I have discovered in my own learning and in the way that I am developing professionally. The use of various formats and genres in this thesis is a good way to authentically preserve, portray and honor my own voice – as artist, story teller, mentor, and person – while underlining and sharing the emotional color, intensity, and significance of my personal and professional learning experiences.

Visual images and Poetry: About "Images of Mentoring 1-7"

I often choose to create visual images when I find that prose is too unwieldy or confining for me to use to convey my feelings about what I experience. This is because visual images make it possible to formulate

meanings that elude linguistic description. Weber (nd) believes that images are a

powerful way of communicating in a variety of ways and on different levels:

> ...Like words, images can be used, construed, and read in different ways and can serve multiple functions. Like words, images are part of who we are, who we think we are, and who we become – they are integral to questions of identity and purpose. Like other aspects of sense making, how images create meaning is a dynamic process involving dialectical negotiation or interaction between the social and the personal aspects in any given culture.
> (Retrieved from http://www.iirc.mcgill.ca/ about.html)

Because I often feel constrained by literal language and because my

feelings can defy discursive formulation, I turn to visual representation to portray

a clearer, more immediate description of the inner connection that I make

between my lived experience and my feelings. Intended to "express a conception

of life, emotion, [and] inward reality" (Langer, 1957, p. 26), my paintings,

drawings, and collages function more symbolically than linguistically. They thus

become metaphoric in nature, and "point to what are conceived to be significant

parallels, analogies, similarities within the subject-matter of the discourse..."

(Scheffler, 1960 p. 47), while articulating "what is verbally ineffable – the logic of

consciousness itself" (Langer, 1957, p. 26).

Carl Leggo (1997) talks about poetry as being

> ...made with hands and conjured with the spirit...truth with chaos in its heart...an ample space for drawing close and hiding away...a story with holes, a reminder that the whole story is never told...   (pp. 132-134)

Like the visual image, poetry has also provided me with a metaphoric way to transcend the limits of literal, analytic language. Poetry speaks more directly for me. The use of the poetic vein has expanded my realm of possibilities for expression, allowing me to break down and break through linguistic boundaries – giving me another means to convey the intensity and shades that are part of my personal experiences and emotions.

Twinned together to form single units, my poetry and visual texts comprise my "Images of Mentoring". These Images of Mentoring assume a special role in this thesis: placed at the beginning of each chapter to act as a "signpost", each one indicates the mood and tone of its chapter and the story contained within it.

About Narrative Inquiry

Much of this inquiry will take the form of narrative vignettes taken from my practice. I have chosen this method for several reasons, but chiefly, because this is one of the ways in which I make sense of myself and the events that surround me. I am impressed with Rossiter's (1999) assertion that "the self is an unfolding story. . ." (p. 62), an assertion which she explains by talking about how the act of telling stories is probably the main way we human beings make meaning: "...as we understand the world and our experiences narratively, so also do we understand and construct the self as narrative. The self is thus constituted of the narratives of experience..."(ibid.). This view is supported by what Connelly and Clandinin (1999) have to say about the stories we live by, and the way that they form the "...intellectual thread...that helps us to understand how knowledge, context and identity are linked..." (p. 4). Stories that are carefully chosen and

shaped by both the teller and the listener can open gateways into our interior landscapes. They can, indeed, reveal the meaning in our lives enfolded in the details, and unfolded in their telling and serious contemplation.

Through the construction of stories of my practice and the examination of what they embody, I gain a different perspective of my values and myself in relation to my practice and the people I mentor. This new insight leads to both personal and professional growth, and, as we shall see, brings me to a closer understanding and a new appreciation of myself and of my job as a mentor. Using stories is also a way for me to break the silence under which I have lived for a long time – a useful vehicle for sharing my concerns and my innermost feelings about the way that my chosen profession and my personal life impact upon each other.

The narrative form is never passive, in the same way as it is never just interpretive, or just reflective. Freire (1970) writes convincingly about the way in which story telling can lead to analysis, and then how analysis leads directly to strategy. Once the situation is analyzed, he maintains, strategies employing appropriate and effective action can be taken to change or modify the circumstances. From there, action leads to another round of reflection, analysis, strategy, and action. Such is the process of personal liberation and growth. Knowledge, then, emerges from narrative when it is used strategically and in a connective fashion to bridge the "telling" and the "doing".

Of course, choosing the narrative to comprise a large portion of my thesis is also a matter of personal style and preference. I have chosen to write personal narratives that show – as opposed to tell about – my experiences in an effort to

answer the question "So what?" Trying to make my meaning clear to unknown readers forces me to re-examine my ideas and beliefs more rigorously than I would do when journaling, because it compels me to give my thoughts a clearer shape.

About Mentoring: Relevance of This Thesis

Just where do I think I'm going?

The specific mentees who people the stories in this thesis were chosen to represent certain situations that I have encountered throughout my practice as a mentor – mentoring dilemmas or paradoxes that I feel have challenged me to connect with my values and to come squarely face to face with situations that have no readily apparent "right" or "wrong" course of action for me to take. I consider these to have been problematic situations not only because there seemed to be no single prescribed action to be taken – but because any action that I contemplated making seemed to contain certain moral or ethical consequences that might impact upon other issues and events. These are not necessarily "success stories" in the traditional sense of the word.

These stories of my practice illustrate my attempts to develop and expand certain mentoring skills and to align myself more fully with my values in interaction with my students. In an attempt to improve my practice as a mentor, I have constantly asked myself how I can help these people I work with to grow academically and personally so that they can shape and live their lives

purposefully. Some of the questions that I have been examining as a result of this involve the nature of mentoring:

What is mentoring? What does mentoring look like? Why should anyone engage in a mentoring relationship? What can mentorship and mentoring communities add to the educational process? Do I have my own particular "style" of mentoring? What skills are necessary to enhance a mentoring relationship? Are all mentoring relationships the same? If not, what comprises the difference? What is the relationship between teaching and mentoring?

Although there are studies that have been done on mentoring gifted students (cf. Zorman, 1993; Clasen & Hansen, 1987; Runions & Smyth, 1985), at risk students (Flaxman, Ascher and Harrington, 1988), and adolescents (Erikson, 1963 and 1980; Flaxman, Ascher and Harrington, 1988; Reilly, 1992), very little appears in the literature about high-school aged adult education students. Experienced mentors and educators like Daloz (1999), Brookfield (1990), Parks (1986), and Mezirow (1991) give suggestions on mentorship and offer information about the problems faced by young and older adults enrolled in university programs, but there seems to be nothing addressing these same issues for the slightly younger populations (adolescents and younger adults) returning to school in an adult education high school environment. This thesis begins to address this gap by presenting a detailed description that captures some of the essence of my practice working with these young adults.

CHAPTER TWO

On Becoming a Mentor with "Zack": Goal setting
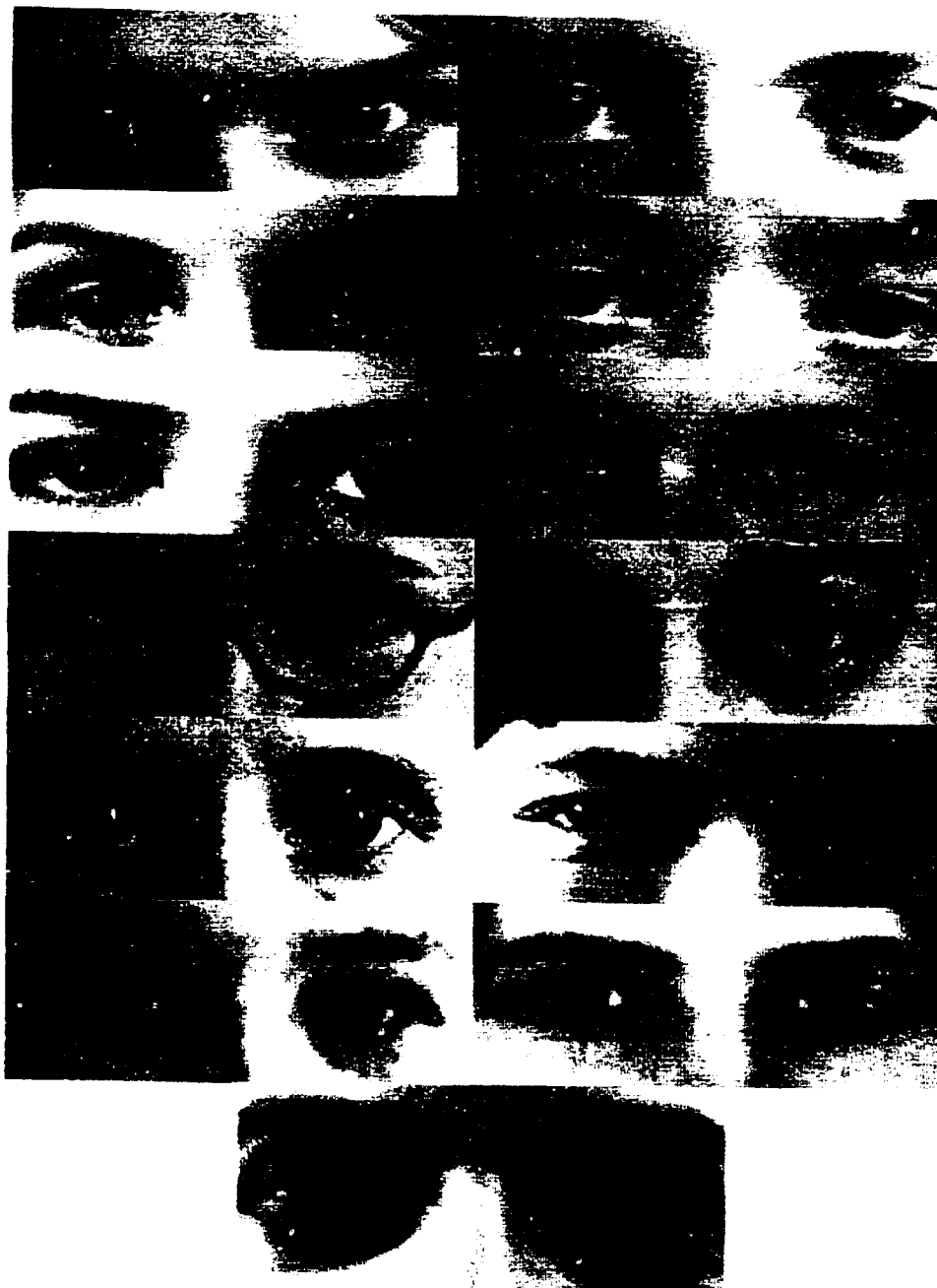
Image of Mentoring 2.

Here's Looking At You (photo collage)
-ksc, 2001

The Beginning: I meet with my mentees

It is mid-September. Thirteen pairs of eyes stare out at me. They are attached to thirteen bodies, to people with names that I have just learned: Catherine, Hugh, Heidi, Hank, Holly, Melissa, Robin, Misha, Rita, Morgan, Lyza, Clarissa, and Zack.

We are in my classroom - the first real one I've had in three years. Its pale blue walls seem to glow ever so slightly. Sunlight floats through the windows, avoiding the piles of books and files I have yet to put away and coming to rest on the circle of tables where we sit.

The group waits, the white three-ring binders, the Personal Planning Portfolios that I have handed out, still in front of them. I watch as some flip through the pages quickly while others haven't even touched them at all. I notice that no one is talking yet. They are awkward, a bit unsure.

There is a certain air of anticipation. I have promised them something and now I need to clarify what it is that I have just said, because I have just told them that I am their mentor.

I hesitate, chewing on my lower lip. I am really unsure of how to begin this session, afraid that I may scare them off, may lose them, alienate those who do not already know me before I get the chance to let them know that...that what?!

Can I really tell them that I care about them, these people I scarcely know? And yet, this is precisely what I intend to do, because that is what mentoring is to me - a personal commitment to other human beings to help them

achieve what it is they want to, a caring about who and what they are and want to become, a sharing of ideas, resources, and experiences.

I wince at the absurdity of me, a teacher in a small, rural school, trying to accommodate all their needs. I have read the reports, seen their records, marked their placement tests. I already know that, for the most part, they are needy beings. That is why they are here.

At saner moments I question the audacity of my taking on this role. But at this precise moment, I can no longer wait. This is what I do, I tell myself: I am a mentor, and this is how I do it, by watching, listening, and caring. It's time for me to begin.

I plunge right in - aware that I am "acting dans le vide", working without a net. Trying to catch each person's eyes, I start talking.

One of the people listening was "Zack".

Don't ever
flatten out the sharp edges,
those idiosyncratic little corners
of your character
into more acceptable configurations
just
to fit in.

Instead...
walk out into the world arms open, chin up.
Accept no alternatives.
Take no prisoners.
Be you --
fearless, physical,
bright.

-ksc, 2001
Poem written in response to "Zack"

"Zack" was an excellent example of the type of young teacher-dependent learner who made a conscious decision to enter the adult education system as opposed to completing his high school leaving in the "regular sector" at our local high school. He first came to our center in 1996. A bright individual whose slow, lazy grin and relaxed manner made him instantly likeable, Zack appeared to fit into our system, yet he did not seem to be progressing and seemed to be suffering from a lack of motivation. When he was assigned as a student to me in the 1997-98 academic year, Zack was continuing this pattern of disinterestedness and was on the verge of being asked to withdraw from the

program. I contracted with him to get a specific amount of schoolwork accomplished in a set time, and he responded quite well to these imposed deadlines. Although he began to experience a certain amount of progress under this method, he disappeared from school in mid-May, claiming that he needed to work. I was confused and frustrated because after a year of meeting with him, I did not seem to be able to help him get any closer to achieving what he stated was his goal – that of getting the DES.

In September, after a number of interviews, Zack was accepted back conditionally and allowed to re-enter school and continue in our program. This was the second year in a row that he had been accepted on a provisional basis at school, which meant that he was on shaky ground academically and not likely to be allowed to return the following year.

I was appointed to be Zack's mentor. Zack and I reviewed his academic and personal situation with our on-staff counselor and decided to use our mentoring sessions as a vehicle for enhancing self-directed learning through goal-setting skills. At that time Zack was informed that it was "highly unlikely" that he would be able to graduate in May '99 and that he would be lucky indeed if he could complete all of the credits he needed by December '99.

Initially, I was quite shaken up by my mentoring encounters with Zack. Like the previous year, it seemed that I couldn't get anything concrete from him. Zack, for his part, seemed to take everything in stride. He was polite, popular, charming, very bright, and seemed to be very much aware of what he wanted to

do and what he needed to get done, but something wasn't clicking during our mentoring sessions. Figuring that perhaps another mentor might be able to help him, I quietly asked around the staff room to see if another teacher was interested in taking him on. No one volunteered. Most, when asked, downright refused: Zack was perceived to be a capable student, but one who was sabotaging himself. It was gently pointed out to me that if I just left him alone, he would sink or swim. My personal impression of these encounters was that the entire staff seemed to feel that because he was but one of a number of problematic students, losing him might be no real loss. I was reminded that if he really wanted an education, he would come back in his own good time.

Appalled by their brutal common sense, I left the staff room and drove home wondering what to do. I knew that although I was missing many of the right mentoring skills to work with Zack, he was worth spending my time on. I decided that I couldn't just give up on him because I was the one missing certain vital skills – it was my responsibility to learn those – but I also knew that continuing the mentoring relationship would have to be a joint decision. I had been doing a lot of reading about self-directed learning and began to look at Zack's actions through that paradigm with an eye toward trying to engage him in his own learning. Finally, I decided to use a technique called "the mirror" (Rogers, 1951) as a way of letting him see what it was that I thought I heard him telling me.

Using the mirror involves a standing back and reflecting on oneself, on what one has done and why. The general idea behind the mirror is that the ability to reflect on past action and compose future action is one of the ways in which

the capacity for an inner life or "interiority" – the dialogue within the self – begins to develop. The mirror, then, is a powerful tool that allows people to see what it is they have shown/told others and to judge for themselves the appropriateness of this upon their "still, small voice" inside and the path that they have chosen to take.

Actually, using the mirror was more of a means of verification than anything else for me, because I was afraid that perhaps I wasn't really hearing was he was saying, or somehow changing what it was I had heard into what it was I wanted to hear. Or maybe it was something that I hadn't heard?

When Zack verified that I had, indeed, heard him correctly about wanting his DES, I decided to challenge him directly by asking him exactly how he planned to go about it. We brainstormed his values, his interests, his habits, and even possible ways of circumventing his methods of sabotaging himself, and then I told him to think about what he really wanted. He left the classroom shortly afterwards.

Later that day, people told me he had left the schoolyard. I really thought that I wouldn't see him again. I spent another several nights wracked with indecision and disgust at myself for being so pushy and obviously uncaring. I reluctantly and tearfully came to the conclusion that I mustn't be cut out for mentoring.

About a week later, Zack came back to school and told me that he had decided to go for the DES. This was in late March. Graduation was to be held in May. He had most of his Level V English, his Level V French, his higher math

course, and several assorted option courses to finish – a total of 23 credits remaining. With 54 credits normally required for graduation, it looked close to impossible.

We decided on a plan of action, taking one course – small parts of one course, actually – at a time. After looking at the situation, his other teachers took him aside and told him that he could try, but that it would be probably out of the question for him to earn the 23 credits he needed by June. These same teachers then came and spoke to me and told me not to encourage something that might be so potentially "damaging" to him as a learner.

Zack was, naturally, quite discouraged by this new development, and a bit mystified by what he perceived to be a lack of support from his teachers. When we discussed it, I looked him in the eye, took a risk and told him that I would support him in whatever action he decided to take – no matter what, but I did inform him that he would need to make a firm commitment to himself and to me in order for our plan to have a chance of succeeding.

He promised me that he would do his best to not let either one of us down, and he asked me to help him keep that promise. Although I had to tell him that I couldn't be responsible for his learning, I assured him that, if he told me the types of things he wanted me to help him with, I would do my best to help him work out strategies for success.

Inside, I was reeling: *"Just where do you think you're going?"*...

What was I doing? What was I trying to prove...and to whom? I was sure

that I had bitten off far more than either one of us could chew, and that we were both running a real risk of alienating the other teachers and staff. In spite of all that, I chose to believe in Zack.

Zack's first challenge to himself was to find a way to get right down to work every morning without spending too much time talking, so we devised a way to do that. I think that this was the first time he realized that he could, indeed, control what it was he was doing and when he was doing it. It was the watershed of his learning.

The next major breakthrough was the first goal he personally had set and accomplished, that of handing in his second English assignment on time. From that moment on, he realized that he could learn and that he could direct and control his own learning. He became almost incorrigibly enthusiastic.

His confidence and his enthusiasm continued to grow by leaps and bounds, as he became more successful at directing his own learning by meeting the goals he had set, and soon he began devising other strategies to help keep himself on track, finishing off courses in record time. It was as if a light bulb (or an explosion?) had gone off in his brain, illuminating all the dark spots and connecting them together.

We unabashedly celebrated every course Zack finished. Some days it actually felt like we were going to parties, and not to school. People looked on and scratched their heads, but it felt like the right thing to do with Zack. Soon all of my mentees caught the "party spirit". My little classroom became a beehive of activity.

It became obvious that Zack would graduate in May. As a gift to me, he made a videotape in which he tried to explain the process by which he had become more self-directed and how it had come about. In this video (see Appendix A for transcript), Zack talks about the confidence he feels in his newfound abilities and his vision for the future. (An audio taped recording of the videotape is available on the CD attached to the inside cover of this thesis.)

Zack did, indeed, graduate in May, finishing all of his course work and taking his final exams in June. Based on his positive mentoring experiences, he made a commitment to peer mentoring, and returned to the Center every Wednesday in the 1999-2000 academic year to mentor other students and to help them become more successful in their own learning. A number of students responded quite positively to his interventions and got caught up in his enthusiasm. As a result, they have become more involved in their own learning because of his caring concern.

Zack was my first real "success" in mentoring. Together, we learned a lot about learning, each other, the mentoring relationship, and ourselves. This experience with Zack affected me tremendously and illustrates my growth as a mentor and what I bring to my practice. Most specifically, it clearly reveals one of the values that I bring to my mentoring practice – namely, that of acceptance of the individual and the respect for that person's ability to make decisions about his or her own learning.

My mentoring experience with Zack proved to me that I could make a

difference as a mentor and showed me that a mentoring relationship could work well with students who are part of a younger, disaffected adult population. This experience demonstrates that as a mentor I helped an adult learner to set his own goals in a way that assisted him to become responsible for his own learning.

One of the characteristics of a self-directed learner is that the learner can devise strategies or tailored ways of making the learning easier and individually more meaningful. By working with Zack on his goal setting as a way of helping him to improve his learning, I influenced his learning by giving him skills that enabled him to take greater control over that learning. Most specifically, Zack demonstrates this self-direction and responsibility by modifying his goal sheet and the way he looks at setting his goals.

I have a 6½ minute videotaped segment of Zack, which shows him reflecting on his goal setting and action planning. This is a concrete and important way in which I can actually see my own influence as a mentor at work. In this segment, Zack clearly states that he considers himself to be a self-directed learner: *"I haven't always been a self-directed learner"* saying *"...I've become more – more directed in my learning; I've become involved in what I wanted to learn and what I would learn".*

As well, he refers to the fact that he changed the goal-setting sheet (see Figure III) he had originally been given, adapting it to meet his own needs as a learner so that he could set goals more effectively:

> *...For example, we had a goal setting sheet that were given – every student was given at the beginning of the year, and – uh – I didn't like the way it was formatted. I didn't like the way that we had – that we*

*would put our goals down, put the date we wanted to do 'em and – uh –
I changed it to shorter time periods because I find that I learn better in
shorter time periods......[But] if I set my goals in weeks or days or even
classes, I – uh – I get it done quickly and more – I get it, it's better...I
find if I set – I set myself – if I take one project and I take pieces of the
project and say this is the time I'm going to be done, then I find the final
outcome of the project is better than when I would rush it...*

Figure III. Zack's goal-setting sheet

Zack gave me a letter ("Zack", personal communication, April 14, 1999) in

which he answers questions on certain issues that I asked him to think about

during our mentoring sessions (see Appendix B for a copy of this letter). By

asking him to reflect on these issues, I facilitated critical reflection.

In this letter, Zack expresses the fact that he feels that he is responsible

for his own learning by emphasizing that he is the one who sets his own goals:

> *I play a key role in planning my goals and setting a time frame in
> which they will be met...I also think that I have developed a learning
> style that I am pretty pleased with.*

Most specifically, Zack refers to the fact that he has found that he needs to

adjust his goals to help him learn more effectively:

> *I have also discovered that setting smaller goals in shorter time spans forces me to meet them...I was setting my goals nearer to a month for each project I was working on. Now I take peices of the whole project and set a goal to finish them by then end of the week and sometime by the next few days. This helps me see what needs to be done and accomplish it.*

A portion of my diary entry of November 17, 1998 (see Appendix C for this entry and another sample entry of my self-study diary), concerning a mentoring meeting with Zack in which we talked about goal setting, shows that I was aware that I might have influenced his creativity by opening up possibilities for him to exercise his own freedom and choice:

> He seemed a bit surprised when I voiced the opinion that maybe he shouldn't even BOTHER taking home his school bag – that maybe he shouldn't bother studying or even pretending to at night. His suggestion was that maybe he could set aside one evening only a week to get some schoolwork done, but we let it go there and went on to talk about more productive stuff. I then asked if a daily sheet might be helpful, because I know that he's used to working with this type of thing in Sheila's class, and he agreed that it might just work...BUT he offered a couple of suggestions in terms of redesigning the sheet: he requested that he have a space for his proposed daily goal inserted and another which verified whether that goal had been met or not. (See enclosed.) He says he'll give that a try for a week or so to see if it's helpful, monitoring his successes (or non-successes?) himself.
>
> I think that he's learning a STRATEGY! Self-directed learning is on its way (well, at least it's a possibility).
>
> <div align="right">(Childs, 1999b)</div>

As a result of our work together, Zack saw himself as being more responsible for his own learning. I was thrilled to realize that he believed that my influence had helped when I read what he, as a graduating learner, had written to me in the *1998-1999 AES MEMORANDUM*, the school yearbook:

> *...First I would like to say thank you for believing I could do it*

when there were people who doubted it. Second thank you for helping me and letting me grow as an english student and thank you for helping me see that I want to continue my education and thank you for being an inspiration...I have grown and matured a great deal, and you were a big part of the process...

("Zack", personal communication, May 12, 1999)

Zack's original plans were to attend CEGEP or university in January, 2000. To date, because he has been supporting his mother and the rest of the family, he has been unable to save enough money to do so.

Mentoring Revisited

As a mentor working with a population of younger disaffected and marginalized adults in a rural school board, one of my chief responsibilities is to help my mentees to develop those skills necessary to foster academic achievement and/or progress – in essence, to encourage these mentees in the learning process and to help them attain their academic goals. Yet, my mentoring "duties" do not seem to stop there. I have often noticed that expanding and enhancing this academic progress and success leads directly to personal and individual growth through an increased self-awareness and a sense of purpose.

My experience with Zack allowed me a certain insight into the world of mentoring and mentorship in a way that I had never realized could exist before. Although I had thought that I had understood what mentoring was and what the mentoring relationship might be, it was only in light of Zack that I could understand the appeal and potential power and value that mentoring could have.

Accordingly, my concept of what mentoring is grew from that incident. It has grown substantially over the years as I have worked to incorporate strategies and techniques into my mentoring practice that would foster both academic and personal growth in my mentees.

Mentoring, itself, has a long and interesting history. Homer's story of Ulysses illustrates the origins of mentoring: Ulysses, knowing he was to leave on a long journey (the Trojan War) but reluctant to leave his son Telemachus without a role model, asked Mentor, his most reliable and trusted family servant, to guide and safeguard the young boy. Mentor seriously undertook this mission – guided in his task by Athena, the goddess of wisdom. Athena, herself, also took on the role of "mentor" later when she appeared to the young Telemachus and urged him to search for his father. Through this, Telemachus assumed his responsibilities as a young adult, set his goals, and learned more about himself and about life (Reilly, 1992). The terms "mentor", "mentoring", and "mentorship" are derived from the advisory role that Mentor exemplified in his efforts to guide the learner to new levels of personal development. Following his model, the term has come to represent a close personal relationship between a teacher-guide and a usually inexperienced learner. From these relationships, one derives the sense of a close, trusting, personal relationship, where a more experienced partner imparts wisdom, and shapes and guides the (younger) protégé's growth and development.

The actual act of mentoring is said to have begun with Greek philosophers such as Socrates, who acted as a mentor to Plato. Plato, himself, then acted as

mentor to Aristotle, and Aristotle, following the tradition, became a mentor to Alexander the Great (Cox, Daniel, & Boston, 1985). Eventually, mentoring became institutionalized within medieval colleges like Oxford and Cambridge, where it was considered to be an essential component of a sound education from the 16th century onward (Kearney, 1970).

Modern mentoring has roots in the apprenticeship system. With the rise of the early trade guilds and the apprenticeship system in Europe in the nineteenth century, the traditional definition of mentoring changed somewhat to include the notion that transferring knowledge could be either theory-based or skills-based (Clutterbuck, 1985). Today the concept of mentoring seems to quite comprehensive. Mentoring relationships, often referred to as "mentorships", can be found in the literature of various domains including business and education, revealing no real consistency in approaches to mentoring (Maynard & Furlong, 1993; Shea, 1992). There are a variety of definitions of mentoring, and of the contexts in which mentoring occurs (Fletcher, 1998; Lilley & Newton, 1990; Anning, 1991; Wildman, Magliero, Niles & Niles, 1992; Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1983; Burnard, 1988; Hagerty, 1986), to the extent that Jacobi (1991) states that

> ...descriptions of mentoring programs are so diverse that one
> wonders if they have anything at all in common beyond a sincere
> desire to help students succeed   (p. 505)

Some authors discuss mentoring in terms of stages and phases of the mentoring relationship, designating it as either a highly-structured or informal relationship which can be either short-term or long-term in its duration (Shea, 1992), with a high proportion of relationships following basic stages of

development (Kram, 1983; Dodgson, 1986; Martin, 1994). There is even more variety to be found in the personality of mentors, in the levels or different degrees of mentoring – to say nothing of those who are being mentored (Fletcher, 2000; McIntyre & Hagger, 1993; Maynard and Furlong, 1993; Bernard, 1988; Shapiro, Haseltine, & Rowe, 1978). With all this variety, then, it is not surprising that there is not uniformity of approach to mentoring – no one "right" way to mentor. There is, however, a general assumption that mentoring is a good thing, and that it is beneficial, not just to those being mentored.

Although mentoring in its most general sense may be described as a purposeful, helping relationship between two people, it can often refer to a learning relationship between two or more people who wish to share and develop a mutual interest. In fact, there appear to be different ways of looking at mentorship. The traditional ("classical") notion of a mentor as a person who acts as a guide, advisor, and counselor, is but one way of looking at mentoring. Beck (1989), claims that a broader concept of mentoring seems to have evolved in education than in business, stating that a mentor in the field of education is generally expected to provide not only intellectual, but vocational and psychosocial support, as well. For their part, Pleiss and Feldhusen (1995) in their discussion of mentorships and the special interactive bond that often exists between the mentor and the mentee, assert that, despite the fact that mentors often take on a number of different tasks, they should not be confused with role models or heroes. Although Daloz (1999) certainly agrees with that, he concentrates more on the fact that there is a certain closeness between mentor

and mentee in his descriptions of the mentor as a guide and companion – especially when he describes the characteristics of support and challenge that can affect learning within a mentoring relationship.

Levinson (1978) believes that the mentor is a person who helps others in realizing their life aspirations. He does not deny the closeness that Daloz speaks of, yet chooses instead to focus in on the mentoring relationship as one that can add appreciably to one's personal and spiritual development. As well, he states that mentors generally enter people's lives during times of transition. The theme of spirituality within a mentoring relationship is one which English (2000) carries even further, seeing mentorship as something which *transcends the competition and negativity that often sully the learning environment, by fostering and affirming informal relationships that promote growth and change*" (p. 120).

Mentoring can be a number of different things in a variety of diverse settings. It can occur in classrooms, in offices, in informal situations, in churches, among practitioners – in other words, wherever there are people and a need arises. Mentoring, as a helping or people-oriented skill, often includes ideas and approaches that come from counseling psychology – which deals with problems with behavior and feelings – and most specifically, from the humanistic and non-directive counseling tradition proposed by Carl Rogers (1951). The essence of this facilitative approach included an emphasis on the three "core conditions" of counseling which Rogers felt were to be used by anyone who would help another come to grips with a personal problem. These are an accepting stance (or "unconditional positive regard"), an empathic sensitivity to the other person's

problems, and a genuineness or authenticity (often called "congruence") of one's own feelings (Medcof & Roth, 1979). These core conditions are especially important and relevant to mentoring.

Mentoring has also been influenced by Gerald Egan's model of skilled helping (Egan, 1990). This is a practical but reflective three-stage approach to helping and problem solving. The first step consists of helping clients to identify the problems and possibilities inherent in their present situations. In the second stage, emphasis is then placed on helping them to construct new scenarios and to set workable goals. These two stages help clients to find their own voices to tell their own stories, and from there to create their own meaningful agendas for purposeful action. The third stage -- that of helping the clients to select and implement viable strategies for action -- can be put into action only after the first two stages are completed. According to Egan's model, helping, then, is quite dependent upon the interaction between helper and client.

The focus in the helping / counseling tradition has tended to be strongly client-centered, with the person being assisted seen to be the sole source of purpose and direction. As such, the helper or mentor needs to be an excellent facilitator, capable of bringing as much open-mindedness and flexible strategy to the mentoring relationship as possible.

Adolescence, in particular, seems to be an intensely challenging stage in life. Erik Erikson (1963) describes the adolescent as living under the "tyranny of they", and maintains that there is a great need to develop a self to counterbalance this power. The growth of this self in such a way as to achieve

recognition socially, he claims, is *the adolescent ego's most important accomplishment* (p. 211). Erikson (1980) also describes adolescence as a period of transition when youth blend their individual personalities and cognitive abilities with their ability to identify with others. This process permits them to form an image of how they see themselves fitting into this new adult world. Burton (1977) believes that mentors can model that image.

If one takes into consideration what Levinson (1978) has to say about mentors generally entering people's lives during times of alteration and transition, the idea of incorporating mentoring into those places, phases and stages where transition is most likely to occur, makes a great deal of sense. Since adolescence is a transition period fraught with great change and stresses, Reilly (1992) suggests that mentoring can play a major role in easing the pre-adult through this stage. Flaxman, Ascher and Harrington (1988) define the mentoring of youth as:

> ...a supportive relationship between a youth or young adult and someone more senior in age and experience, who offers support, guidance, and concrete assistance as the younger partner goes through a difficult period, enters a new area of experience, takes on an important task, or corrects an earlier problem. In general during mentoring, mentees, identify with, or form a strong personal attachment to their mentors; as a result, they become able to do for themselves what their mentors have done for them. (p. ii)

As well, the theories of adult change and development abound with references to mentoring. Levinson (1978), for example, elaborated a theory of "life structures" and crises which the individual goes through, passing from one life stage to the next, and consisting of alternating periods of stability and

transition. Levinson's original study was carried out with a group of men only. Although it can be argued that his theory can only legitimately deal with the life structures that men go through, my experience leads me to believe that some of this theory may hold for women as well.

To successfully make the Early Adult Transition which begins at age 17 and ends at 22, young people need to start moving out, thereby leaving the world of adolescence. This involves questioning it, changing or ending certain important relationships (persons, groups, or institutions), and reappraising who they are. In completing the stage of adolescence, there are separations, endings, and transformations which need to happen.

These same individuals, then, need to take preliminary steps into the adult world, so that they can form their own ideas of their place in it, and develop adult identities (Levinson, 1978). These transition times are seen as providing "teachable moments" where there is a "readiness to learn" (Schultz, 1995, p. 58). Mentoring provides a way of meeting the needs of students going through the transition from adolescence to young adulthood, providing an opportunity for both mentor and mentee to grow and learn at these important stages.

Many young people who have had experiences of failure in high school often have low self-esteem, unclear goals, and poor attendance and work/study skills. They are in need of individuals to model these qualities, to give them support and encouragement, and to provide clear information and structure in setting goals. In fact, it is especially during this stage that mentoring, according to Gladstone (1987), often results in improving the students' overall school

performance, as well as in developing greater social and personal skills, and increasing self-concept.

The transition into young adulthood can be made more easily and gracefully when the emerging self is recognized and invited into a wider arena of participation by trusted adults. Mentors not only support and encourage their mentees in setting and meeting their goals, but also can provide a certain amount of challenge by fostering the idea of personal excellence and heightened self-worth through the recognition of the emerging self. By providing a place and a space where the growing potential self can come into being, mentors thus become nurturers of enlarged knowing and being.

Is this what I achieved with Zack? Was I a true mentor? The theory cited above sounds a little too idealistic and self-aggrandising for me to feel comfortable in making such a claim. The stories in the following chapters will wrestle further with the question of who I am as a mentor and what it is that I do.

Envisioning Goals: Looking At My Own Approach To Mentoring

My inquiry into my own practice officially started in late September, 1998, when I met with my mentees for the first time and discussed the idea of goals and setting one's own goals, goals that would reflect each individual's reality, abilities, and dream(s). It was during the course of this discussion, that the word "success" made its first appearance. Working off of a definition of our own making, we resolved to look at "success" as a conscious act "to decide where I am, who I am, and where I want to be". This decision was to prove a major turning point for us, both as a group and as individuals interacting with each

other, because this decision recognized what was to become the most important part of the mentoring process for all of us – the idea that the individual person, with all his or her needs and talents, was important and had extreme worth. Accordingly, we realized that we shouldn't undermine our own worth by comparing ourselves with others, and that we as individuals really can't set our goals by what other people deem important: only each individual knows what is best for her or himself. As an educator, this learning was to have significant repercussions on the way that I dealt with my mentees and other students: this was to be the first time that I was actually forced to hold myself accountable to the values that I had always stated were important. From that moment on, I had to trust and accept that each person was, indeed, a functioning adult, perfectly capable of formulating decisions about who and what he or she was, and where he or she wanted to go.

The Plan

After the success that I had seen with Zack's goal setting, my next step was to work out a very simple seven-step plan for use in working on goal setting with each mentee in our individual mentoring sessions. This plan is based on a modification of the Personal Planning Portfolio in use at the Adult Education Center.

The "Plan" consists of seven steps:

1) **Developing a vision.** This may be a "long term goal" or a dream of what each learner wishes to accomplish. We try to commit this vision

into words and onto paper as best we can, because dreams can't become goals or even reality until they are put into words.

2) **Taking stock.** Working one-on-one, we take stock of where the mentees are, where they see themselves as going, what they are already doing well, and what they need.

3) **Goal setting.** The actual goal setting begins after taking stock is completed. Working off "Progress Chart part 1" (see Figure II, p. 19) found in their Personal Planning Portfolios, mentees fill in their short-term educational goals, their long-term educational goals, and their vocational goals. These goals may be very similar for many learners – for example, one's short-term educational goal (something that can be completed fairly soon, like getting one's high school diploma) may also be one's long-term educational goal if further education is not seen as part of one's future. As well, many times learners are unsure of their long-term educational goals or even their vocational goals. After this, I ask mentees to write down their goal for the year. I remind each one that a goal must be very specific/concrete as well as measurable, stated with no alternates, and be growth facilitating (constructive, not destructive). For example, an effective goal for the year might be: "I will finish both parts of level IV English (ENG 4061 and ENG 4062) as well as 3 parts of level V math (MA 5065 , 5066, and 5067) by May 14."

4) **Formulating an action plan.** Using "Progress Chart part 2" (Figure IV), a plan of action evolves in which learners will take small steps towards this goal, each one a subject-specific goal – each with a time limit and a specific task. These subject goals will be set after consultation with their subject teachers as well as their mentor.

PROGRESS CHART: part 2	Name:		Page:			
Course	Unit/Book		Projected Finish date	Date finished	Mark	Tea Init.

Figure IV. Progress Chart part 2.

(5) **Taking stock again.** At every mentoring session (or more often, if needed), we take stock again to see how things are going and to help us evaluate our plan of action.

(6) **Revisiting the vision.** As often as we can, we revisit the vision, constantly checking and verifying to see where mentees are in relationship to their vision and their stated goals, and changing them to align them more precisely, if needed

(7) **Asking the question "Am I there yet?".** As our final, and seventh,
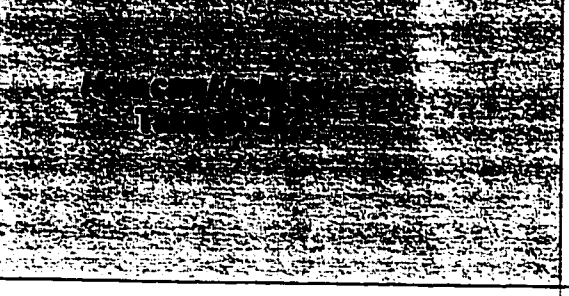
step, mentees ask themselves whether they have accomplished their goal(s), whether they are where they want to be in relation to their goal and their action plan.

Initially, I was very satisfied with this plan. It was simple, concise, and my mentees knew exactly what most of our mentoring sessions would involve. After using it for several months, however, I became dissatisfied with its slightly formulistic approach to mentoring, and searched for another way to implement it. Currently, the Plan has been changed so that each step in it also corresponds to a question or series of questions that I have developed as a way of forming a framework for our mentoring sessions.

A Framework

This mentoring framework came about as a result of a summer class that I took with Jack Whitehead and the single question that he had asked each one of us to answer on the first day of our class: "What do you value in education?" I was impressed with the way that particular question could be used as a vehicle to open dialogue and to enhance critical reflection. I decided to employ questions of a similar nature to foster conversation and to sustain the mentoring relationship.

The following table (Figure V) shows how I incorporate the idea of structured steps with open-ended questions into our mentoring sessions:

EDUCATOR-MENTOR	LEARNER
How can I help you... **Formulate your vision of excellence?**	*I begin the process of "writing" my life story by narratively developing my personal vision of excellence.*
• Tell me about yourself.	...I think about what matters to me in my life, what I really care about.
• What do you care about?	...I try to formulate and communicate these values.
• Why does this matter to you?	...I write value statements as means of clarifying and explaining them.
• Who are you?	...I use value statements as a way of describing myself.
• Who or what do you want to be?	...I begin to "see"/create my own vision.
	...I use value statements as basis of self-knowledge to locate and identify aspects of myself in terms of what I would like to be / do.
• How can you use this information to help yourself?	...I assess this personal information in terms of its potential usefulness.

• Where do you see yourself now?	...I try to honestly appraise my present situation.
• Where do you see yourself going?	...I communicate / articulate my vision as I see it becoming clearer.
• What do you already do well? *(May want / need some help or prompting)*	...I come up with a list of what I do well / talents and gifts.
• What do you need? *(Mentor may be able to help with this because of knowledge of specific programs, etc.)*	...I try to determine what I may need to accomplish my vision of excellence. This may include a list of skills I feel I need to acquire and/or weaknesses I may have.
How can I help you... Take your learning forward by prioritizing and setting goals?	*I begin a process of goal setting based on values, a clearer concept of myself, and an emerging personal vision of excellence.*
• How can you use the information you now have to help yourself?	...I re-assess or re-evaluate information in terms of its present usefulness.
• Where shall we start?	...I brainstorm possible points of departure.
• Which one do you want to concentrate your energies on?	...I pick one aspect to work on. *(May need some gentle guidance here)*
• Why have you chosen this to focus on?	...I give reasons for this choice.

• Can we set a specific time frame in which to accomplish this goal? *(Additional information on goals and goal setting may be advisable at this stage)*	...I try to determine a realistic and workable date for the goal. *(May need some help in adjusting goal)*
How can I help you... **Formulate an action plan?**	...I initiate an action plan with small steps – each one with a time limit and a specific task.
• How can we use what information you now have available to come up with a game plan / plan of action? *(Mentor furnishes time line information, perhaps helping to plot plan. May ask additional questions as needed for prompts)*	...I start from my main goal and try to prioritize other parts, placing them into a logical order within a possible time frame. *(At first I may need help adjusting goals and time frame)*
How can I help you **Come up with strategies to** **help you learn?**	...I become more aware of the ways in which I learn best. I start the process of learning how to control the context for my own learning.
• Tell me how you go about learning something. *(Accepts answer as is, reframing it into possible learning styles. Asks for confirmation/verification.)*	...I tell my story about learning (which may or may not include subjects and school). I begin where and when I wish and include as much or as little information as I deem necessary, ending where and when I want..
• Looking at your action plan, can you identify any parts that you feel you might experience difficulties with? *(Might need to "nudge" here)*	...I use self-knowledge to identify those aspects, which I feel might present difficulties.

• Why might this (these) be hard for you?	...I try to determine why these areas might be problematic for me.
• What do you think you could do about it? / How might you be able to make this easier for yourself? *(Encourages learner to come up with as many solutions as possible. Reframes when necessary. Asks for confirmation /verification)*	...I brainstorm several possible solutions for each anticipated problem area. ...I make a list of these solutions.
• Which of these possible solutions do you think would be most helpful and effective for you to use?	...I choose one to use / experiment with. Perhaps I will give reasons for this choice.

Figure V. Mentoring framework.

The first mentee that I felt comfortable enough with to try using this framework was "Morgan".

CHAPTER THREE

Mentoring as Listening To and Valuing "Morgan"

Image of Mentoring 3.

Drifting Towards Aporia (watercolor)
-ksc. 2001

Elsewhere, the ruin is within.
Soft snow falls, piling up
in high pillows
of silence –
suffocating all thought.

Here in Aporia, the sibilant percussion comes,
emptying my head
of all words –
leaving a fullness
reminiscent of deep listening
and truth telling.

There is a brightness in you –
a richness of spirit
that sings of brilliant blues and purpled exuberance,
of awakenings, marvelous discoveries,
and moments in the sun.

Become a blue jay on the highest branch in the tree.
Abandon yourself to
total happiness and delight.
Hop, skip, and bounce with glee.
Know that the branch will not break.

- KSC, 2001
Poem written in response to "Morgan"

"Morgan Dawson" was the third child of two teachers who were close friends and colleagues of mine, part of their second family and a good seven years younger than her two older siblings, who were friends of my own children. So even though I may have known her for her entire life, I had always thought of her as one of "the babies", losing track of her during her later childhood years. When her mother informed me that Morgan had decided to attend Adult Ed, I asked that Morgan be assigned to me as my mentee and looked forward to renewing our acquaintanceship.

The young woman I met early that fall was a force to be reckoned with. Morgan had a cute, pixie look about her that belied her athletic abilities, her strong personality, and her age. She was well spoken, bright, vivacious, and

strong personality, and her age. She was well spoken, bright, vivacious, and quite determined to do things her way – which was quickly, very quickly. I should have realized sooner that with her determined attitude she was bound to step on a few toes during her adult education career.

Having Morgan in my English class was grand fun because she was so irrepressible, articulate, and bright. In contrast to a great number of my other students, her home environment and basic upbringing had given her a certain amount of confidence in herself, and her early years of being schooled at home had fostered a strong ability to work independently. Or perhaps I inadvertently framed her that way because of the similarities in our social class and backgrounds.

Whatever the case, unfortunately, I soon saw that although teachers like myself may have regarded these qualities favorably, Morgan's fellow learners were not tremendously impressed by them and, accordingly, were not overly fond of her and her attitude. She was perceived as being snobby, pushy, and whiny. She chose to ignore most of them.

Morgan desperately wanted to finish her required schoolwork so that she could graduate as quickly as possible. She keenly felt the disappointment of not having graduated with her class, and was extremely upset to think that her younger sister might actually graduate before she did. This desire to get as many credits done at once took control of Morgan's life – and led to quite unrealistic personal expectations and a refusal to accept her own limitations. Brought up to believe that she was capable and bright, Morgan attacked academic life with a

zeal that many of my other learners in the center did not have.

Morgan immediately recognized the advantages of being regarded as an adult learner and insisted that she constantly be treated as one. Whether staff members liked it or not, Morgan took us all to task when she felt we were being inconsistent in our behaviors towards her as an adult. She frequently locked horns with teachers and seemed to like to shake things up. Whenever she suspected that she was being treated in the same way as she would have been in the local high school – "...like a *baby!*" she would indignantly wail – she would be up and running in full "Morgan mode". Her eyes would narrow and flash, her voice would become strident, her hands would clench, and her head and chin would come forward in a manner not unlike a boxer or a bantam rooster. The very next thing I would see would be Morgan, flushed and angry. Two seconds later there might be a telephone call or a quiet request for a quick conference from another teacher.

In particular, Morgan's impatient attitude often led her into direct conflict with her math teacher. A wonderfully inventive and patient teacher who insisted that all of her students should know their math forwards and backwards before subjecting themselves to the traumas of a math exam, this woman was the only person who taught the higher math levels in our school. She was tireless in her insistence on structure and on using tried and true math methods – and equally determined that all her students should love math. Although she worked wonders with a variety of difficult students, something about Morgan irritated her. Morgan somehow managed to push all her wrong buttons.

This was not a one-way street, though. No other person appeared to be able to (unintentionally) rile Morgan quite so thoroughly or so quickly as this math teacher. Morgan would grow frustrated with what she termed her teacher's "unreasonable fussy, perfectionist attitude", visibly chafing under the obligation of having to get 100% on all pre-tests and assignments before being allowed to go on to the next module. If she were not allowed to take a test she felt ready for, Morgan's disappointment would be palatable. Quite unable to control her unhappiness, she would demand to know exactly why as an adult she couldn't take the test when she wanted to. This, in turn, would upset the teacher. Morgan's sudden departures often disrupted the usually calm and controlled classroom atmosphere. Neither person felt comfortable with the other. Hurt feelings abounded.

As Morgan's mentor I often found myself in the middle of a disruptive situation such as that with her math teacher, one that involved hurt feelings all around. Despite the fact that I often agreed with her and felt that she was not being treated as an adult, I could certainly also sympathize with my confreres. Most of the time Morgan did not behave like an adult at all but more like a spoiled, willful, inconsiderate child.

As Morgan's mentor, I subscribed to the theory that because Morgan was enrolled in the adult education system, she deserved to be treated as an adult. Teachers' mindsets or beliefs about students can become self-fulfilling. Because of this, I believe that teachers must change their mindsets in order to be able to effect a change in students' mindsets. In other words, I believe in treating the

students I have not only as they are, but as they will be – as functioning, capable adults (Phillips, 1997). In Morgan's case, this was often a very difficult thing to do – not because she couldn't behave as an adult, and not because she hadn't had a number of various models of adult behavior throughout her life, but because she often simply lost her temper. Mentoring Morgan involved learning how to value her unique gifts and talents as a person and consistently treating her as an adult, while trying to help her find strategies to act and react like the adult we both believed her to be.

This was no easy task. To begin with, as I have already mentioned, I spent a lot of time listening to complaints, both from Morgan and from my fellow teachers – and very quickly learned the first of many extremely useful lessons. In the heat of the situation, any comments from me – whether supportive or to the contrary – were simply not heard, so I discovered that it was more productive to let people say what they felt needed to be said without interrupting them.

I also learned to pick my time to offer my opinion. Immediately after these angry people had wound down was really not the right time to offer comments or solutions. Instead, a nonjudgmental attitude was required from me. Quiet, calming words of assurance that they had, indeed, been heard and that their opinions mattered were what people needed – and wanted – to hear. Taking a page from my own book, I realized that people needed space and time to be able to think things over, and that they, like me, became far more receptive to other people and possible solutions after they had reached that point.

The more I thought about it, the more I realized that as a younger adult,

these encounters hurt Morgan's feelings in a far different way than the rest of us. For Morgan, being in Adult Education meant that she had entered a new juncture in her life, one which opened up the opportunity to be treated as an adult by other adults, and not as a child. When she felt that the very people who had assured her that she was an adult were not treating her that way, she was deeply wounded and her newly found sense of adult pride was offended.

As her mentor, I believed in Morgan fully. I felt it was important that she not only realized this, but that she felt supported in her decisions and respected as a person – and as an adult. Yet, I was also aware that at this stage in her life she was in transition between two very different emotional worlds and that this stage can be a devastating time. How, I wondered, could I help her leave one behind and enter the other, and help her discover ways and means to deal constructively with the inevitable feelings of inadequacy or vulnerability that accompany that transition?

Asking this of myself was a sobering, challenging moment for me, because I very clearly saw that I was probably one of Morgan's first *adult* relationships outside of the parent/child framework. Being Morgan's mentor meant that I would need to be able to lay down the foundations for a relationship that would lead to other relationships, a relationship that could help her to open up to the world at large and that could provide her with the skills to make sense of the world on her own. In essence, my job would be to slowly make myself obsolete. I needed to be able to provide Morgan with unwavering support as she made the first of many transitions that would eventually allow her to support

herself – and, perhaps, to reach out to others.

Morgan, especially, needed to learn some coping skills in order to get where she wanted to go, to become "successful" in our adult education system. Yet what I sensed Morgan needed first and foremost was someone to simply listen to her. My classroom soon became a safe place for Morgan to talk, a place where she could rant and rage to her heart's content – a place where she was never told that her feelings and her problems were silly, immature, or unrealistic. I figured that if these things were important enough for her to express, then it was important enough for me to listen. As well, I knew that if she needed to cry, scream, shout or whine for long periods, it was equally important that I be there for support. Because she needed to know that I respected and valued her as an adult, I needed to show her that I was willing to stand by her without judging her as a person, even at difficult moments.

Those were not times to talk, to resolve, advise, conclude. I had to let Morgan do that. I had to trust that allowing Morgan to express herself freely would enable her to come to her own solutions or conclusions in her own good time...and perhaps, if she asked for it, with some help from me.

I quickly discovered that paying attention to Morgan's initial outburst could do much to defuse a situation and was enough to make her feel validated, comforted, and strong enough to cope. Difficult though it often was when I was teaching, I made it a point to be quietly available to her when she would appear at my door, obviously distressed. Many times, this support took the form of just walking with her down the hallway while she shook with indignity and anger.

Sometimes all it required was for me to greet her at the door.

After a while, Morgan, too, realized that the act of simply removing herself from a situation and wending her way to my classroom usually made her feel better. I would look up to see her standing there, and she would give me a look of supreme exasperation, and then sigh audibly before leaving. After class, I knew we would somehow connect if the situation still warranted it. It became a code, our special signal. These were signs of growth – baby steps, to be sure, but steps all the same.

Lecturing Morgan thus did not seem to be an option I wanted to take. I knew that she wouldn't hear my words, no matter how well intentioned they might be – and I didn't want to break trust or scare her away. Luckily enough, I had come to a point in my own life where I had started to examine my own values and actions, and had come to the conclusion that knowing what it was that I valued – what I really cared about – had helped me become very clear on my own path. I wondered whether this type of self-knowledge might be able to help others become equally clear on their own goals, and so I decided to ask each one of my mentees to be able to describe or tell me what it was that they truly valued in (their) life. I figured that goal setting might be made easier for us if we knew in what general direction we were going. As well, I am all too aware of the fact that many of the learners in my care had never been asked that question and had never had to formulate some sort of response to it. I maintain that once we can answer that question, we can start to get down to the real business of education – getting ourselves ready and fit to lead our own productive lives.

Specifically, I wanted to hear what Morgan had to say. Although we had often discussed goals and dreams in a general fashion, much of our work together had been "crisis management" or had revolved around determining the types and numbers of credits she needed. Because she was unusually articulate and quite capable of expressing her feelings, I was equally curious to get feedback from her in terms of whether she thought it might be a valuable exercise for others to try.

In response to my questions, "Who are you? What do you value?", Morgan was very quiet at first. She spoke in general terms about what it was she thought she wanted out of life and then told me that even though people had often asked her questions like this before, no one had ever seemed to want to hear her answers. Worse, she said that her impression had been that no one had expected answers to those questions. When she left our session, she told me that she would think about it and get back to me. The following poem was her response:

Who am I?

I am "Morgan",
short in stature, strong in resolve—
an imaginative, adventurous sort,
an elfin woman-child whose caring spirit
bridges the gap between
the who-I-am and the who-I-will.
I am a structure based on love,
bolstered up by family,
tender concern, and dedicated energy.

It will be for me to protect those who cannot always be heard,
to cherish the young and cure the unloved:
to give all I can, to the best of the being
that my God and I can create.

I am "Morgan",
always evolving, yet in many ways
always the same.
- 1999

(The CD attached to the inside cover of this thesis includes an audio recording of Morgan reading her poem.)

In this poem, I could see a number of elements that are part of Morgan's value system and life purpose. To begin with, she describes herself as resolute, imaginative, adventurous, and elfin-like, claiming to be both a woman and a child – although I happened to notice that she intentionally puts the word "woman" well before "child" – with a caring spirit. As well, she declares that she is

...based on love, bolstered up by family, tender concern and dedicated energy,

all of which are values or features of her life which are obviously important enough for her to mention.

As well, Morgan indicates what she sees as her future – her vision for herself – by using the words *It will be for me...* and going on to speak about her desire to protect, cherish and cure, and of her belief that whatever she can give of herself will come from the best of the person that she and her God can fashion together.

Looked at as a whole, Morgan's values and her life purpose involve caring, love, family, concern, dedication, God, cherishing, protecting, and curing. She fully acknowledges these qualities and values when she admits that she is aware that, although she is growing and changing (*"evolving"*), she is in many ways the same person.

Interestingly enough, Morgan also mentions earlier on in her poem that it is her caring spirit which bridges a

gap between the who-I-am and the who-I-will ...

thereby making a distinction between who she now is and who she will become - as if she were, indeed, two distinct selves, a "now self" and a "future (possible) self".

After reading this poem it came as no real surprise to discover that at this point in her life, seventeen-year-old Morgan had a goal of working in the field of pediatrics. Her poem shows that she sees herself to be firmly set on a course of action, well aware of who and what she is.

I never would have known these things about Morgan had I not been able to approach this subject in a wholly different way than before. Even Morgan learned new things about herself through this exercise. Although I was surprised by the fact that her answer to me was in the form of a poem, I also realized that this was a very articulate and adult way of expressing and seeing herself.

After reading Morgan's poem I was more convinced than ever that Morgan was a very special individual, indeed, one with wonderful gifts and talents that could be put to use in her chosen field. But I could see from her dealings with certain people in Adult Education that she would need a bit of help in learning how and when to pick her "battles". It occurred to me with a jolt that this was probably the underlying reason that she and I had somehow come to meet, and that my task as mentor would be to search for ways in which I could confirm and strengthen Morgan's integrity and her vision of herself while helping her to find the kind of acceptance in the adult world that she craved. I hoped that once she felt validated and accepted as an adult, the kinds of responsible, responsive contributions she was capable of making would come in their own good time.

Until Morgan could move away from an impulsive decision-making process and towards an evaluative one that not only took emotions into account but also considered things like values, outcomes, circumstances and long-term goals, she probably would not be able to feel either "successful" or "adult".

We started out by identifying her goals and her needs, working from her short-term goal of graduating from high school to her middle and then long-term goals – that of going on to university and then medical school to become qualified to treat children. We then brainstormed the types of things that might stand in her way of completing these goals – everything from not getting her high school leaving certificate, to not having enough money to attend the various schools, to marrying and having children. At each obstacle, I asked Morgan to list several positive as well as the (obvious) negative effects each obstacle might have on her life, and then asked whether she felt that there was anything in her control that she could see herself doing that might be able to change or modify the outcomes. The only real thing that she could see herself being able to effect was how quickly she could get her high school diploma – and in order to do that, she needed to pass her advanced math courses. In order to pass her math, she reasoned, she would either need to be able to find of way of working with the math teacher, or she would need to change schools and complete her work elsewhere.

This was where Morgan needed to make a conscious choice to pursue the path that made the most sense for her as a person. I placed this decision squarely in her hands, counseling her to review the situation more deeply and to

consider all the options she felt she had open to her. I told her that I felt she needed to come to some sort of decision as to how she wanted to proceed from here, and that this decision needed to involve the steps that she felt she needed to take to deal with the situation in such a way that preserved her own integrity and led to the best long-term outcome for herself. I reiterated that I had confidence in her ability to sort the situation out and that I would do everything in my power to support her in whatever decision she made.

The decision to stay in Adult Education was Morgan's decision entirely. True to my word, I had helped her in the only way I felt I could: I had listened to her and not judged her, neither had I offered my opinion, nor had I treated her any differently than I would have treated another adult. I did try to model the kind of decision-making process that I, myself, have used and that seemed to make sense to me, but I was willing to let Morgan make her own decisions about her own life.

"Just where do you think you're going?"...

Internally, however, I could feel my entire system lurching as ridiculous questions came swirling into my brain: What if Morgan chose the "wrong" path? What would I tell her mother? How could I be so irresponsible as to let a child choose her future? Who did I think I was? Just where was I leading her?

Deep inside, though, I knew. I really did. I knew that I needed to trust my own values in the same way that I was advising Morgan to trust hers. Morgan might have been young, but she was an adult with a growing sense of self-

awareness and enough interior strength to recognize that she could make choices about how she could become who she wanted.

When Morgan asked me to help her find ways (she called them "strategies") to help her deal with the math teacher, I almost kissed her. I felt relieved, vindicated, and I admired her for making a decision that I knew was a very difficult one for her to make. Both Morgan and I came of age that day. But, what if Morgan had chosen to leave? Would I really have respected her decision? Would my confidence in my own values been shaken? These are troubling questions that as a reflective practitioner, I must ask – even though I can never really know the answers.

One thing is certain: Morgan reminded me that the very first thing that mentors must learn to do is to pay very close attention to what their mentees say. The mentor's job must be "to listen to the dreams of the pilgrim" (Daloz, 1999, p. 23). What do my mentees value? Where are my mentees going? What do they want for themselves? How do they tell their own stories? What do they dream about? The question is really about who these people want to become, about what possible person each one wants to be – and that, as the story of Morgan illustrates, is a question that learners must answer by themselves.

Mentoring as Holding Up the Mirror

Morgan's story points to what is for me the hardest part of mentoring – which is dealing with what appears to be its core contradiction. It seems that to really do something as a mentor most times means simply not to do anything at

all. Not move, not smile, not talk, not judge...just sit. Sit. Wait. And care. Care enough to listen. Quietly.

I never realized such stillness would be so difficult: I have had to work at it with every fiber of my being. In doing so, I have learned to hear what is left unsaid as well as what is said, to bide my time and bite my tongue, to hear beyond the words and spaces. I have had to learn to trust. Immediately. Unconditionally.

Part of that trust happens every time I hold up the mirror (Rogers, 1951), that proverbial mirror that allows my mentees to see what it is they have shown/told me. It is not for me to angle the mirror, to distort or change the image in any way. I must simply show them what it is, to hold it up for them to verify – or modify.

I believe that this is the best and strongest way that I can demonstrate what it is that I truly value, a way in which I can let them know that I do indeed value them as individuals, that I hear what it is they say, and that I respect what it is they know and want.

I hold up that mirror with all the trust, strength and love that I can muster, and we take it from there.

Learning to Listen

There are two ways of spreading light: to be
The candle or the mirror that reflects it.
—Edith Wharton

I have had to learn a great many things along the way as I have grown into my mentoring practice. One of the most painful things that I have had to learn to come to terms with is the fact that no matter what I try or how much I try to help people or make certain opportunities available to them, whatever it is I do will be useful to some mentees but may not be appropriate for others. Of course, that doesn't mean that I needn't continue to try to expand myself to meet everyone's needs — it's just that I probably can't be all things to all people. I try not to let it make me feel inadequate.

My personal challenge as a mentor is to judge when to step in and when to wait. To begin with, it has been extremely difficult for me to realize that waiting or holding in doesn't necessarily mean not helping. Choosing to say nothing at a particular moment, for example, to let mentees make their own decisions is a deliberate choice, and a clear mentoring response. This response, this decision, made at a point of contact with a mentee is a judgment call — and represents what could be referred to as a "teachable moment". Choosing to remain silent should reflect the kind of quiet which comes from listening without judgment. This kind of listening honors the mentee because it involves letting go of certain expectations of that person that I may already have, and of those things that I may actually want to hear said — in essence, I need to listen carefully and consciously in order to hear another person's truth. I also need to be able to listen actively while behaving circumspectly.

Active listening (Rogers, 1951) is an active attempt to grasp and understand the facts and underlying feelings of what is being said. This does not

necessarily mean giving up my own opinions and feelings, but it does mean that I am there to empathize as much as possible. The active school of listening means that I try to respond to feelings as well as words. I need to listen with so much more than just my ears. I need to try to listen with my eyes, and with my entire body: I nod my head, I look at the other person, and I try to keep my stance open and leaning. When I can, I may even encourage the other person verbally.

Despite the fact that I delight so in the spoken word, working as a mentor has led me to form the conclusion that sometimes the absolute finest command of the language may well be to say nothing at all. After all, it has been my experience that there have been a number of times when I have truly regretted having said things, having spoken – but it has been the rare time indeed when I have regretted my silence.

The mirror I spoke of earlier is important to my life as a mentor. I use the mirror because it involves trying to objectively reflect on oneself, on what one has done and why. Through this thoughtful reflection, one develops interiority and begins the dialogue within the self. The mirror, then, is a powerful tool that allows my mentees to see what it is they have shown/told me and to judge for themselves the appropriateness of this upon their "still, small voice" inside and the path that they have chosen to take.

By listening to my mentees and letting them see that I value their experiences and their opinions, I try to help these people anchor their personalized visions of their potential selves – all the while helping them to construct a place of commitment for them to become those selves.

Likewise, looking into the mirror is equally essential for me and for my own

personal growth. By turning this same mirror on myself, I am beginning to glimpse the effect that my mentoring might be having – both on myself and on the people in my care. Gazing intently into the mirror, I look for contradictions, and inconsistencies, scolding myself for those moments gone wrong, searching for ways in which I can rectify past mistakes. I revisit my dream in that mirror as often as I can. I also look for evidence of my own personal "triumphs" and accomplishments, occasionally preening for a moment or two when I recognize signs of new growth, of small breakthroughs. When it happens, the feeling is always accompanied by an intense sense of mystery, and becomes a source of complete wonder and awe.

The mirror helps both my mentees and me to become more conscious of who we are through critical reflection. As we use the mirror more and more, we become aware of and begin to listen with a new respect and trust for the truth of our own "insides"; we begin to listen and become responsive to our own inner selves as sources of authority, as objects of care – all of which results in a greater trust in our own experiences and in our own intuition or "gut"...

As a mentor, it is important that I, too, am able to express my own feelings. When I do speak, I try to open up a conversation that allows me to join each mentee in the search that we both have for a sense of connection, pattern, order, and significance in our lives. Because we are both searching for ways of understanding our experience that make sense of the expected as well as the unexpected in everyday life, I have consciously taken on the role of questioner as part of my approach to mentoring. I have done this because I feel that it is

imperative to help people sort out and confront their contradictions in their beliefs and practice in as supportive an environment as possible.

This idea of using questions to help with decision-making corresponds to a Quaker practice called the "Clearance Committee", in which the person looking for answers or solutions tries to articulate the problem as clearly as possible, and the committee who has gathered to help is not allowed to offer answers or solutions. Instead, the helpers are confined to asking only questions. Although it may appear to be a simple process, each answer actually generates more questions, questions which become more specific each time around. Usually before much time has elapsed, it becomes evident that the individual has had his own inner answers all along – and that the questions he has been asked have actually served to uncover and reveal it. Because the individual's truth is given enough room to make itself known through a caring, respectful, and incisive type of questioning, he or she then can proceed from there, secure in the knowledge that his or her future actions will be in keeping with his own individual wants and needs.

Palmer (1995) talks about this same process of respect by referring to it as paying attention "to a voice before it is spoken" (p. 46). I interpret this to mean that making space for other people and honoring them means not rushing silences with speeches of our own and not trying to force them into saying things we want to hear – in essence, being open enough to hear another's truth.

I have come to the realization that I have been over-schooled to always give answers and solutions. I need to learn and re-learn a very important lesson:

how to listen. This realization, coupled with my belief in the Clearness Committee, has led to my practice of usually beginning my initial mentoring sessions by asking my mentees what it is that they truly value and/or what they care about, and using their answers to generate more questions and answers to help us structure our course of action.

Learning how to listen to what Morgan was saying and valuing her feelings as an adult were the two keys that made our mentoring relationship work. But actively listening and valuing the individual may not be the only tools needed to foster a mentoring relationship, as the next example will illustrate. There may be times when all the skills mentors have at their disposal are not quite enough...

CHAPTER FOUR

Visualizing with "Holly": Keeping the Stories
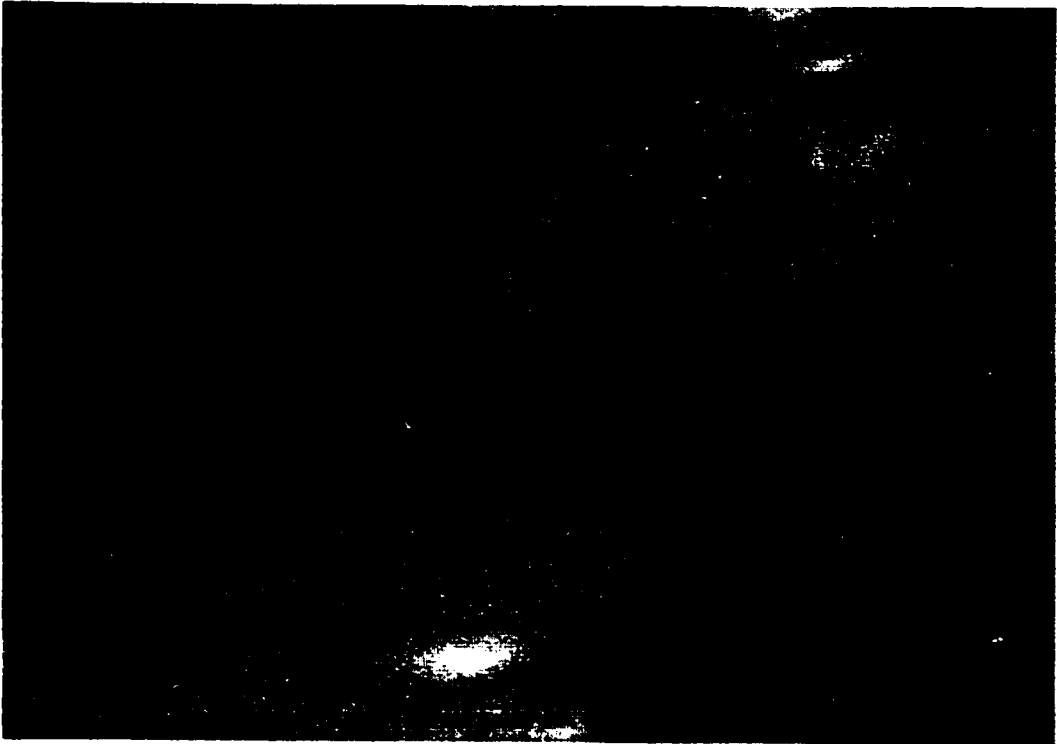
Image of Mentoring 4.

Forest at Night (pastels on black construction paper)
- ksc, 2001

It is night.
With my own narrow shadow for a boat,
I navigate the streams of moonlight
that run between shadow islands
in the tall pine forest.

I drift slow and peaceful.
Floating through a long, calm pool between rapids,
I look for my reflection.
All I see is silver shimmering faintly
on the pine-needled floor.

Fear begins as a slight shiver in the night air...

"Just where do you think you're going?"

Visualization and Goals: Part of My Core Values

Many times, after goal setting has begun to take place, my mentees often develop an individually meaningful vision of the future, and some of them have been able to use this vision either as a guide or as a motivating factor for increasing self-directed learning. Accordingly, I have begun to look at visualization and related techniques as a possible means of enhancing selected goals and of increasing the likelihood of achieving them in the future.

To plan something is to confidently anticipate the future by taking practical steps to meet personal goals and to turn potential problems into opportunities. To use imagery – visualization – is to create a positive vision of the future – to create a best-case scenario. Engaging in positive visualization/imagery includes not only being aware of potential problems, but also perceiving how they can lead to creative solutions.

The basic idea is that by visualizing that perfect performance, goal, or ideal outcome, we actually *seed* our minds with the potential for maximum success. (Capacchione, 2000; Gerzon, 1997; Martens, 1987; Orlick, 2000). Once we have planted that idea in our heads, in our imaginations, our minds begin looking for ways to make our dreams come true instead of worrying about all the ways that they might not.

I believe that we all need goals – clear goals with a special, magnetic pull that can draw us out of our comfort zone, out of the usual way that we approach

things. Yet, it seems that if we envision goals in conventionally limited ways, we end up being constantly threatened by the anxiety of not achieving them.

Although goals are not the same as a life purpose, they are connected in a unique way. Our life purpose is the organizing principle of our existence, but if our goals are only ends in themselves, if they are not somehow connected to us – that is, to who we are in our core being – in a vital and meaningful way, then they become dead ends and achieving them fails to satisfy our hunger for meaning in life. Eventually, we stop making goals and don't bother with them any more – and anxiety begins to take over our life. To find a deeper meaning, then, our goals must be connected to – and organized to serve or further – a greater life purpose. Our life purpose begins to take shape when we ask ourselves the most basic of questions: *Who am I? Who do I want to be? What do I value?*

The ability to visualize a goal is a creative process. According to a number of experts on visualization techniques (Capacchione, 2000; Gerzon, 1997; Orlick, 2000; Shone, 1988; Gawain, 1995), once you have a goal in mind, you must see it, feel it, and become it – in every way possible. Additionally, you must visualize your actions, your behavior, and your relationships with other people (Martens, 1987). This is where the best feature of creative visualization comes in, because visualization actually allows you to have strong emotional involvement and emotional commitment to your goal (Hay, 1987).

As Simonton et al (1986), Fletcher (1999), and Paulson (1997) suggest, guided imagery can be a big help during this process. When we visualize our goals and our plans for achieving these goals in a relaxed state, the images will

be more vivid, and our subconscious mind will begin to generate all sorts of images – some of which we had never thought of before. Once these images are well formulated, we should be able to see them in our mind's eye, at any time of day or night. This is an important part of the process because goals must constantly be kept in mind. The closer we get to our goals, the more we can actually become that person we have chosen to be, the "possible self" (Markus & Ruvolo, 1989; Bandura, 1988; Leondari et al, 1998) we feel we are – our own personalized vision of excellence.

As a mentor, my experiences with mentees like Zack led me to wonder whether the possibility of nurturing and maintaining goals and creating positive, personalized images of opportunities through the sustained use of visualization/imagery would be able to help other mentees – some of whose lives have not seemed to include even the most average experiences of either "progress" or "success". It seemed to be worth a try, and a young woman named "Holly" seemed an ideal candidate to try it with.

Once,
  in childhood,
  I was caught outside
  in a hard rain of broken glass.
Now
  when I touch someone,
  those shards pierce through my skin.

Always put your arms around me gently.

- KSC. 1999
Poem written in response to "Holly"

I first met the young woman I shall call "Holly" a little over a year ago when she became one of my mentees. I had asked that she be placed in my mentoring group – sight unseen – after I had marked her placement test and read the essay that she had written. There was an indefinable "something" that immediately attracted me to her – perhaps it was a turn of phrase or the way that the essay was organized, but whatever it was, my interest was piqued, so she was assigned as one of my mentees.

Thinking back on it now, I don't think that much stuck out about her that first meeting or so, but since she was one of my Level V English students, I knew I would get to see her several times a week. She was very quiet and self-effacing, and quite serious appearing – just the type of student that most teachers like. Yet there was something I couldn't quite put my finger on...

Sometimes, when I am mentoring, I feel myself overtaken by a sensation of unbeing, of a feeling that I am not actually there, that I have slipped somehow out of this life and am melting into another. It is then that I become what can only be described as an energy of sorts, a force that is molded and absorbed by the persona and the task at hand. This transformation happens most frequently when I am working with certain mentees; when it does, it may be nothing short of a miracle.

The true nature of a miracle may well be the fact that a person can take riches from a thing that inside and out is empty – or, as in my experience, when someone can discover untold wealth in something or someone that others have deemed useless or intractable. Take Holly, for example. Whenever I start to panic about the responsibilities I have and the many different roles I need to assume in my job, I think of Holly – for she is one of the greatest reasons I could have for mentoring.

The physical Holly that one sees – a young woman of medium height and build whose dark curly hair barely touches her shoulders, and whose soft, shy yet ordinary green-flecked eyes invite a tentative smile – is only the garment. The real Holly has an otherworldliness that is denied to so many of us.

In fact, Holly has always seemed to me to be a sparrow – timid, perhaps deceptively fragile, but one who emits a lovely, silvery call that is at once evocative of gentle night falls and quiet lakes. Although I have never heard a vesper sparrow's song, somehow the thought of them, the shadow of their name,

makes me hear chanting from the woods on summer evenings – a sweet summoning, a call to prayer. I sense Holly is a vesper sparrow carrying that music deep within her soul, for Holly is one of those people who actually hears the sun come up.

The way that Holly and I got to know each other was probably more due to my intuition than to my good sense. Holly somehow always seemed to disappear when in a group, almost as if she wanted to shrink. This drew my attention, and I began to covertly watch her as she quietly made her way in and out of the classroom. Could she be shy, ill at ease in groups? I decided to wait and see if anything about her situation would change; after all, it was early in the year.

After a week or so, her attendance began to undergo a marked deterioration, and she started arriving late, apologizing profusely. I followed my instincts and quietly sat down with her, after reading her file – a file which had no record of her attendance at the local high school for the past two years – to ask her how she was getting along and to encourage the possibility of a conversation. Little did I know that that was one of the bravest and wisest things I could have done.

During this and subsequent conversations, Holly slowly revealed herself to me. She told me about her frequent bouts with depression and the concessions she had had to make in her life in order to be able to cope with the miserable way she felt. She explained what it was like growing up in a household where unhappiness and clinical depression were considered to be normal. One of several children of a single mother whose severe depressive fits often resulted in

having children shipped off to various homes for undetermined amounts of time, Holly never knew the security of a real loving family commitment – and she quickly learned that she was very different from the children she met at school. She had no close friends, no real pets, no room she could call her own. She was alternately her mother's darling and her mother's curse. Everything changed depending on her mother's whim – and it changed suddenly and unpredictably.

Somehow she made it, relatively unscathed, from the rigidity of elementary school to the more diverse and accepting population at high school before her own personal blackness took over and she completely retreated into herself. As I listened, I was shocked to learn that she had been so affected by her own depression that she had felt physically and mentally unable to attend classes for weeks, and even whole months at a time. For close to two years, she rarely left her bedroom – a virtual prisoner of her own feelings of anxiety, despair, and worthlessness. When she did come out, it was to sneak into the bathroom or down to the kitchen. She tried to avoid contact with anyone else, rarely speaking more than a couple of words every two or three days.

Instead of becoming concerned, her family seemed to find nothing unusual about this behavior, referring to it as being typically "Holly-like", and calling it a "mood". No one confronted her about her odd behavior and no one sought her out. No one seemed to care enough. Soon, it didn't seem to matter...

It was luck or fate that finally brought Holly out of that deep depression and into counseling, and from counseling to us at Adult Ed. In spite of continual counseling at the time, though, she admitted later that the first time she had

walked into my classroom, she had had to stifle the urge to scream and run out as fast as she could. No wonder she had looked so withdrawn – she had been waging a major battle deep within herself!

It would take several months before she was to confess that she occasionally used her depression as an excuse, as a convenient and safe way out of any and all types of commitments. By then we had established a good working rapport and Holly was attempting to come every day to her classes...even if it ended up that she was often very late. In short, I guess she was ready for some sort of "break through".

Poems unexpectedly appeared on my desk, and then were quietly given to me. I was stunned and unsettled by their content and immediately went to our school's guidance counselor for advice on what to do. Together, we mapped out a plan of action which would first involve my speaking to Holly about the rather ghastly and graphic content matter (suicide) and then, if I felt any warning twinges, would have me arrange an appointment for her with the counselor. Luckily enough, Holly spoke without much reticence about her poetry, and asked if she might be allowed to write her research paper about depression and the way that it affected people's lives, using her poetry as an expressive vehicle. I agreed to let her experiment – on the condition that we both be involved in the final draft selection.

It was then that I broached the subject about the visualization work that I had been doing with some of the other mentees, and asked her to join our group

sessions. Although I could tell that she wasn't terribly enthusiastic, Holly agreed to sit in on a few meetings.

Putting imagery into our learning

Bit by bit, several of my mentees had become more and more involved in exploring visualization techniques. Through trial and error, we discovered that many of us really needed to learn or re-learn how to imagine, how to access our imaginations. Consequently, when Holly began to sit in on our sessions, we were testing out different relaxation techniques and increasing our abilities to develop the imagination, to learn how to "see"/"hear" and even "touch"/"smell" mentally (Shone, 1988; Paulson, 1997).

It was becoming clear to me, as well as to a few of the others, that becoming more self-directed, and learning how to set one's own meaningful and realistic goals, involves a certain amount of self-acceptance and self-knowledge. Sometimes, though, in order to be able to set these goals, we need to reinforce or build a stronger self-image. One of the most subtle and pervasive of the ways in which our self-image is affected is through our inner or "intra-talk". In view of this, we began to work at becoming aware of the messages that our subconscious sends us. If these messages seem to be in any way demeaning or self-destructive, then we need to change the way that we "talk" to ourselves – because our intra-conversation most often reflects the internalized vision that we have of who and what we are. In particular, many of us need to learn how to replace our inner communication's negative, self-destructive thoughts with more creative, life-affirming ones (Hay, 1987; Gawain, 1995; Simonton et al, 1986).

Through using affirmations or positively worded statements it is possible to produce an "inner" or "self-talk" that will help us embrace reality in a way that will promote personal and academic growth.

Changing one's "intra talk" can make a real difference in the way that one looks at oneself and the way that one approaches goal setting, learning, and life. We are not responsible for what got "programmed" into our subconscious; all the important software was loaded into our brains during our first few years of life. But as adults, we are responsible for whether or not we keep it there. A major task of adulthood is to take responsibility for choosing our own thoughts in the present.

When Holly joined us, it seemed like the perfect time for us to look more closely at those inner messages we were sending ourselves. We began by listening – amid gales of laughter – to various (commercially-produced) taped affirmations, and then decided – amid even more gales of laughter – to write our own individual affirmations. Although I did my best to keep the procedures light, the mentees in my care were quite aware of the fact that something of this nature had a very serious and important side to it. Those who wanted or needed to speak to me in private, knew that they would be more than welcome and free to do so at our individual mentoring sessions, where we could deal with certain issues if they wanted, quietly and without interruptions. As expected, Holly was one of those.

Producing an affirmation tape

Holly's personal affirmation tape – the transcript of which is reproduced on the following page – reflects the basic process we all followed. With her permission, I originally drafted a list of affirmations (Figure VI, below) that I thought she might find useful, drawing these from a number of sources, but relying chiefly on our numerous conversations on the subject.

Some of my mentees decided to write affirmations of their own, without any suggestions, whereas others solicited help from family, friends, and/or the others in our group. All were encouraged to make their tapes as "authentic" as possible.

After we had had a chance to sit down and discuss these items, Holly then took the list, made whatever changes she felt comfortable with to it, and recorded her personal rendition – complete with her own choice of music. When she was satisfied with it, she shyly allowed me the opportunity to listen to it – several days after she had already tried it out.

Possible Personal Affirmations for Holly
- ➤ I am a magnet for miracles.
- ➤ I am intelligent and creative.
- ➤ I have interesting and valuable opinions on all sorts of subjects.
- ➤ I am well-liked and respected by everyone I meet.
- ➤ I am confident and self-assured.
- ➤ I look forward to meeting life's new challenges.
- ➤ I speak up for myself.
- ➤ People listen to what I have to say.
- ➤ I am a highly resourceful person.
- ➤ I can easily make myself heard and understood.
- ➤ I am constantly adding to my storehouse of knowledge and wisdom.
- ➤ I like myself and I love the person that I am.

Figure VI. My draft of affirmations for Holly.

Her own copy, reproduced in Figure VII, reflects the various changes and stages she underwent before coming up with her final version. Interestingly enough, this final version reflects her on-going battle with depression and shows her tremendous concern with self-love and self-acceptance, the depth of which I had only an inkling prior to reading her poems and hearing the tape. (See Appendix D for a transcript of Holly's completed affirmation tape. The CD-ROM attached on the inside cover of this thesis includes Holly's audio taped rendition of the affirmation tape.)
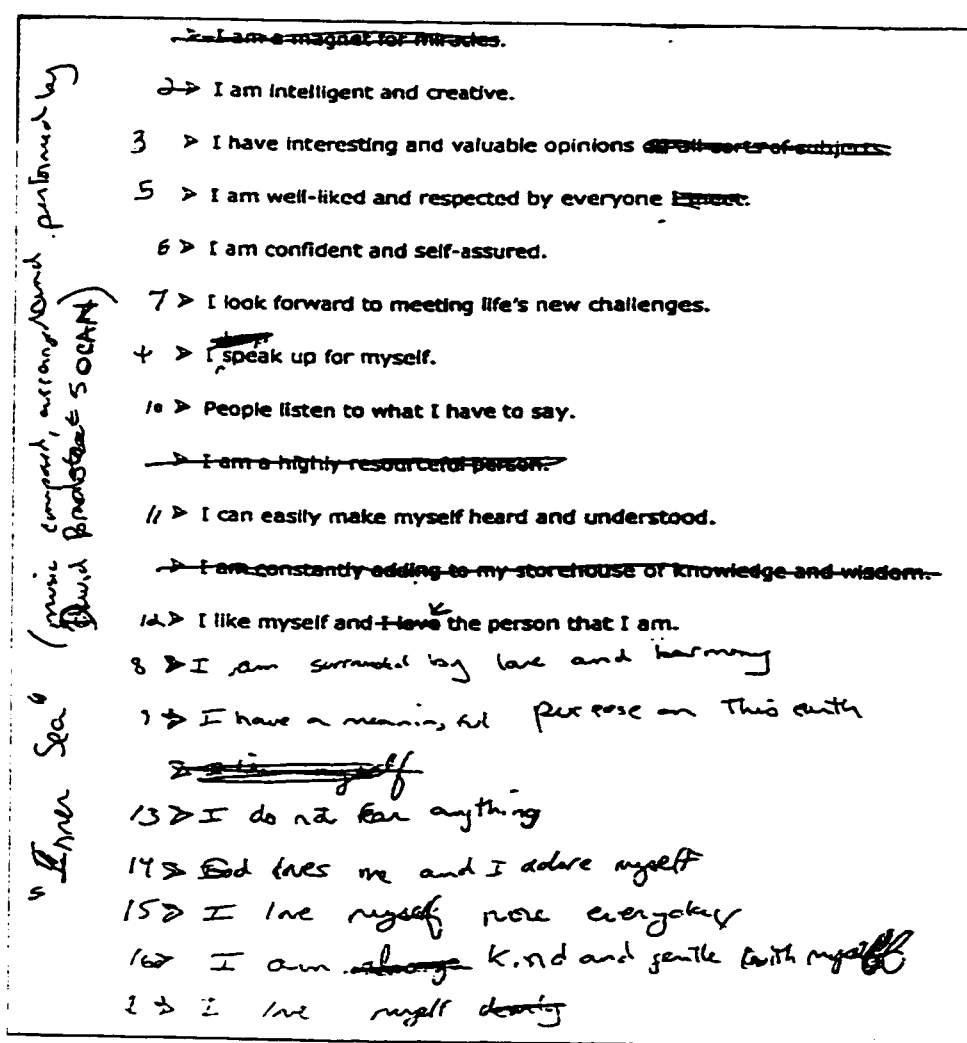
Figure VII. Holly's changes to the affirmations.

Like the others in the mentoring group, Holly made a commitment to listen to her tape at least once a day (perhaps more) for a minimum of one month and to see whether the affirmations made any significant difference in her life. She claimed that she felt that the tape did, indeed, help her to cope better with the day-to-day stresses of coming to school. Certainly, at approximately the same time, I happened to notice that not only did her attendance improve, and her marks were correspondingly better, but that she appeared to be a bit happier and more in "sync" with the rest of the ebb and flow of the student population during this month or two.

I know that Holly made great efforts to listen to her affirmations regularly and to believe them, but she did confide to me that she really hated hearing her own voice all the time. It came as no real surprise to me, then, to hear that Holly had decided to stop using her affirmation tape after the initial "try out" period. Yet, despite the fact that, to my knowledge, she was no longer using affirmations, I saw this incident as being a turning point for my work with Holly, and Holly's work with, and for herself.

To begin with, Holly became a bit more aware of – or at least more vocal about – how much personal work she might have to do in order to begin the true healing process. When she began her research paper investigating depression, I quite frankly wasn't sure just how much work she might be able to do before she became discouraged – or worse, more depressed. Instead, Holly surprised us

both by openly acknowledging her disease in a whole class meeting to discuss her research and was quite matter of fact as well as "human" about her struggles. She answered questions, gave examples, and finally read some poetry and narratives she had written. The class was stunned by what to them may have seemed as an outburst of energy and confidence, as well as by her courage in coming forward and talking about such a "taboo" subject.

At that point, Holly and I made a major mentoring and academic decision together. We determined that she had the opportunity to graduate last year. Initially, neither one of us had thought that this would be within her grasp within one year of coming back to school, but once we had examined the situation, it appeared that she could easily get the remaining credits necessary for the DES and graduate with her friends.

Graduation was the first "normal" thing that Holly had done in a long time. From that point on, a vision of the future began to appear for Holly: after graduation, she would come back to us for the remaining credits that she would need to go to CEGEP, and then in 2001, she would apply to Dawson to take courses, starting on her path to become an elementary teacher.

Throughout the summer, we remained in (loose) contact because I sensed that she needed a friend as well as a mentor and teacher. In spite of the fact that our lives were so different and we lived over an hour apart, we chatted on the phone, we giggled, we went shopping once or twice. Yet even I was not prepared for the Holly I met early this past fall.

When she walked into the classroom, I scarcely recognized her! Gone was the slightly hangdog look, the apologetic walk. In its place was a very attractive young woman with cascading shiny hair and an almost confident, yet definitely happy expression on her face. Holly looked great!

Although her schedule did not place her in any of my classes, Holly "checked in" with me a lot. She appeared to be taking a greater interest in her own life and appearance – an outward sign of the kind of efforts she was making in her personal healing process. She was very happy to sit and chat with me during breaks, and began to become openly more affectionate, often hugging me when she left and allowing me the opportunity to hug her back. For a sexually abused child, I felt that this was a major breakthrough – not the idea of needing affection, but the idea of offering her own and returning mine...allowing herself to be touch emotionally and physically.

Although all seemed well, Holly knew that her struggle was far from over, and that one of the aspects of her disease is its insidiousness. Within a month, Holly was struggling to get out of bed and to leave her house to come to school. She dropped her physics class, claiming that the male teacher – who she has always liked – was starting to "scare" her (she now admits that he was expecting her to hand in her work regularly), and that she didn't really need the course, anyway. Her class load down to three blocks a week instead of the usual six or more, Holly attendance slid even more...until I despaired of ever seeing her again. A quasi-sexual relationship she attempted made her even more distraught. I worried while she continued to backslide, only able to offer my

friendship and unconditional support, encouraging her to continue her work with her therapist. I was powerless to help and I knew it.

Finally, in mid-November, she showed up during one of my classes and told me that – even though she was loath to do it – she was afraid that she was going to have to go back on medication to "even" herself out. Although she was ostensibly asking for my opinion, we both knew that this would be best for her. She felt as though she had failed. I disagreed. It was the darkest moment I had seen her go through.

Within weeks of starting her medication again, Holly started to regain control of her life. It has given both of us a kind of tentative hope and realization that Holly is, indeed, healing. She still needs friendly and constant support – although now she seems to be less dependent on me for guidance, relying on me more for general advice or to confirm and validate her feelings or decisions. This is a major change from last year, when she seemed to be quite hesitant and slow on the uptake, not taking action. Although she is still prone to hesitation and procrastination, she admits to feeling as though she has "come out of hibernation" again.

With her decision to go to CEGEP now more firmly entrenched in her mind, we have taken what we feel are necessary steps to prepare her for the more demanding schedule that she will have at Dawson; accordingly, we have given her another three blocks of classes to attend. Even though the course she has decided to take (geography) is not a prerequisite or necessary course for

her, we both felt that the discipline of forcing herself to come to school more often to work on her studies was very important. In order to make this less onerous an ordeal, Holly takes this course with me, in the classroom where she has always felt "safe". Additionally, Holly's and my unwritten contract reinforces the obligation for both of us to be in class every day, on time.

There have been days when Holly has really not been able to concentrate, but so far she has managed to honor this contract. Whether she is absorbed in her geography or trying to keep herself motivated, though, I have noticed that she has been more "present" in the classroom, more a part of the actual class. She seems more self-assured, somehow less tentative than last year – and she chats more, even laughing out loud when talking with friends. In short, she looks so much happier, more normal than before – than last year.

Perhaps some of this is because she is more aware of her own feelings and emotions. Certainly, she has begun to notice that other people have problems and difficulties, too – some of which she now recognizes to be more problematic or at least equally as burdensome as a number of hers. I believe that the recognition of this, and the knowledge that she is not totally alone, has enabled her to take a greater interest in the world round her.

Something indefinable about Holly has changed that others in the class have noticed as well – perhaps it relates to her bearing or her lessening sense of discomfort, but it has subtly changed the atmosphere in my classroom. She appears to be more confident in her relationships and more likely to insinuate herself in the general classroom banter. This is a major change from the

individual who only used to listen: she now chimes right in or giggles in delight. There have even been times when I have had to ask those in her general direction to be a trifle quieter – imagine having to tell someone like Holly to be quiet in class!

Holly is less positive about her gains than I am. Of course, she alone knows the cost of being happy – and she is the one who has to deal with the turmoil inside her. Currently, she wants and needs to quit smoking, and berates herself because she hasn't. She does concede, though, that it is a crutch that she has willingly taken up. She still thinks that she's fat and unattractive, although I have evidence that attitude is changing somewhat, too: she has been quite pleased with a number of the digital photos of her taken in class, and has said so.

She is still on medication, which she hates...even though she knows that it has helped her become that much more in control of her actions and her feelings. She can't help but be aware of the fact that she has been able to take on more responsibility in her life. I have seen all sorts of evidence of this, but most especially recently, when she told her doctor and therapist that she would like to investigate certain other forms of medication that had been suggested to her. After using the Internet, she felt more prepared to speak with the two of them, and has come to some sort of compromise about what and how much medication she might need to take. These are great strides.

I have learned a lot in trying to help Holly heal. Depression is a

devastating disease that most of us non-sufferers are unable to understand. Our schools and most of our doctors don't seem to be able to help people like Holly take those first tentative steps because they – we – don't really understand the depths of despair or how minuscule those first steps may be. In our society, we expect instant cures, and we seem to be unable to deal with the constant backward and forward steps that healing takes as part of its natural course of growth and renewal.

Holly slipped between the cracks of our regular school system. It was just blind luck or inspired divine intervention that led her to a school like the one in which I work, where we try to see people like Holly as they will be and not solely as they are, and where a mentoring system – based on caring and a desire to help – exists.

Mentoring Holly has made me realize just how different my relationships are with each one of my mentees. Holly is, indeed, special, with unique talents and gifts – and she has very different needs than my other mentees. Unlike my experiences with Zack and Morgan, who needed to be supported but who also needed to acquire certain learning management tools as part of being challenged, my work with Holly will probably not be able to change much about the situation she faces. There is only so much a mentor can do.

There are a number of questions that continue to nag me surrounding my work with Holly: Has my mentoring work with Holly actually helped her – or did those small improvements I saw come about simply as part of her depressive cycle of waxing and waning? Was what I did enough? Have I perhaps hurt her

instead of helping her? Will I ever really know the extent of my influence – for good or for bad – on her?

Whatever gains Holly has made and whatever gains she will continue to make, will inevitably depend on Holly, herself, as she tries to heal. I have done my very best to listen to her, to expose her to various academic and non academic strategies that may be able to help her, and I have supported her as best I can. I have offered her my friendship and I hope that I have managed to convey to her on a number of levels how wonderful I feel she is. I look forward to continuing to be her mentor for as long as she is enrolled in our system. But slowly, I have come to the conclusion that the situation is not about me and whether as a mentor I can help her change her life. This is reality. It is very sobering to realize that as her mentor and as her friend and supporter one of the best and finest things that I can do is to simply be there – and help her keep faith...

Keeping the stories

As I have already related, the most important thing that I do as a mentor is probably to listen. As a rule, I find that most of the listening that I do falls into the category of active listening, empathically supporting and responding to mentees while they speak. However, through my work with Holly I have learned that there is another side of listening – a listening where I am not asked to do anything other than simply to be there, one that does not require a response from the

listener. This is listening that makes me the "keeper" (Randall, 1997) of my mentees' stories.

Being the keeper of stories means that I am a repository for secrets and narratives. I try hard to receive the stories in the way that my mentees give them: shyly, gently, in confidence. I take them as if they were gifts, because they are. Actually, even though they have been given to me, they are not mine, really, to keep; rather, they are treasures given to me for safekeeping. I hold them until they are wanted back, hugging them to my heart. When I return them to their owners, it is because their true value is recognized and known, or when their meanings are clear and no longer threatening or harmful...or sometimes, simply because I know that it is time to relinquish them.

I listen to the way that the stories weave in and out of times and places, peopled by beings that I do not know. I learn a lot about worlds that can never be mine, and I learn about life and living and courage and fear. I also learn much more about hurt and pain than I want to know.

Stories like these have a special life of their own. I feel the heat of their breath on my cheek, as these stories whisper to me. I feel their power. It's as if they were wild, living creatures themselves, with wills and secrets of their own: they need to be tamed – gentled, somehow – before they can go back to their rightful homes.

I listen to one woman's story, told hesitantly, about the sexual abuse she suffered for years at the hands of different "uncles", husbands of well-intentioned women who looked after her when her mother was too caught up in her own

battle with despair to care for her. I hear the words she chooses to describe her own war with depression as they fall to the ground between us, breaking icicles into shards that cut deeper than glass. She is too exhausted to cry, too numb to feel.

I sit patiently with another person as he struggles to master the syllables to tell me about his latest – and best – dream, knowing that his stutter will evaporate once he's well into the narrative. He is not popular, and has no one else to share these flights of fancy with. Such stuff is considered nonsense where he comes from.

These are people who hurt and who are suffering. Their stories and others like them overwhelm me, and I wonder how it is that they can carry on every day under such burdens. But I have also noticed that, once told, certain stories lose their power over their owners, and I wonder if maybe that is why the stories have been given to me to keep.

My mentoring work with Zack and Morgan showed me how important active listening could be, but it was Holly who taught me the importance of keeping the stories. For me, the hardest part of keeping any story is that I cannot change it in any way whatsoever. That is not for me to do; it has no part in the unmentioned bargain we have, my mentees and I. Even though my heart breaks with their pain and I want to reach out to help them and to somehow console them, as keeper of the stories I know that sympathy or reaction is not the reason why the stories are being told. My being there is to give them a safe place to tell their stories, an accepting space where they are able to hear their own words

echoing back to them. By telling their stories, they package them up into words. The players in the stories become characters and are somehow separate from real life. At that point on, I often notice that a huge weight seems to be lifted from them and they can continue with the work that they need to do.

It is crucial to my integrity as a mentor that I bear in mind that when we work together, it must be my mentees' dream and their vision that we work to pursue, that I will try to help them achieve. I am not there to "fix" them or mend their lives. This means that I, too, must work hard at mentoring. I need to learn to accept and understand their pain, and struggle in my own way to come to terms with their grief. They deserve that kind of respect. As I strive to do my best to be worthy of their trust, I constantly marvel at their incredible internal strength, courage, and beauty.

I am learning to mutely hold my mentees' stories as we work together to find comfortable places and spaces between the hurt, the disappointment, and the newly found respite. Keeping the stories is difficult work, but it is part and parcel of being a mentor.

CHAPTER FIVE

Falling Away From My Values with "Misha": Struggling with failure

The Field

It is an evening in late October.
I am walking in an open furrowed field,
The dry earth crumbling into my scuffed
shoes.
A slight breeze stirs the stillness.
I look up...
and I can see them —
the moon's young, trying their wings.
I turn to go.
The winter wheat leans into its own
darkness,
and I into mine.
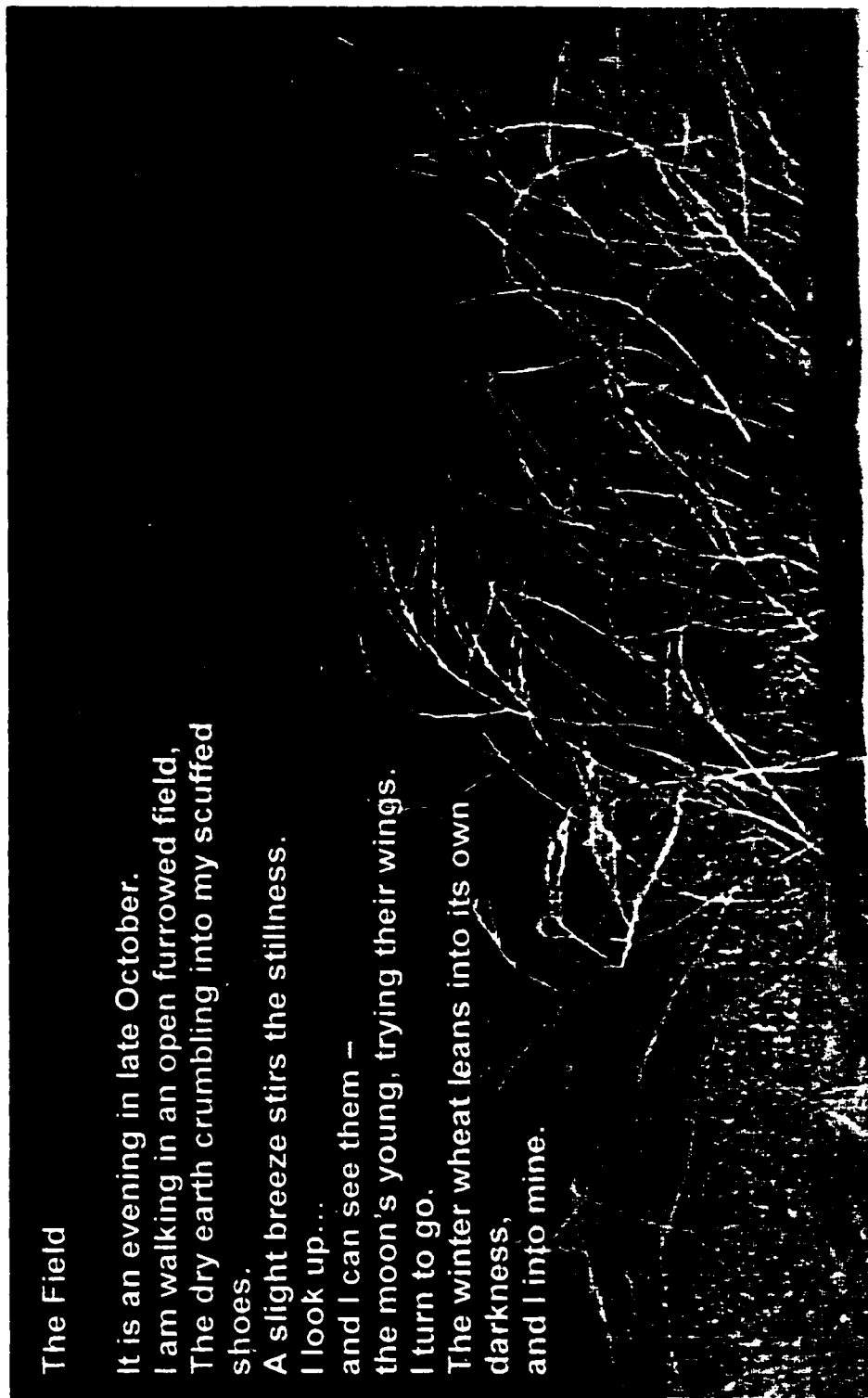
Image of Mentoring 5.

dried flowers on watercolor (collage)
- ksc, 2000

Self-study is on dangerous grounds if it seeks only the evidence of good practice (Mitchell & Weber, 1999). It would be rather easy to fool myself into believing that I am making a major difference "for the good" in my mentees' lives, easy to tell only the stories of my small successes. I can wax eloquently about the young single mother I scarcely knew but who had been so impressed by me that she named her child after me, and about the young woman who has grown steadily more self-assured, buoyed by my unswerving belief in her abilities and gifts. I even find it easy to modestly reveal all those clever and right things that I've managed to say and do in my classroom and during my mentoring sessions for all these years. Unfortunately, though, it's the other stories, the less-than-successful ones, that haunt me, that taunt me, that point out just how inadequate and bumbling I can actually be in my job. And it'd precisely these stories that I must hold up like x-rays to the light in order to discover what I still need to learn – because there is no doubt that in many ways I am what Whitehead (1993) terms a "living contradiction".

There is one prime example that comes immediately to mind when I think of having "blown it" with one of my mentees. I shall refer to her by the name of "Misha".

Her direct gaze stops me.
Those eyes tell the tale of the centuries –
tired and probing, dark as her secrets.
Yet her enthusiasm seems to ever brighten,
her heart puts forth new blossoms of hope,
and her mind remains open to glorious new truths.

If she could, she would be a clarion call,
pleading trumpet-tongued for humanity, for truth, for right –
but most especially, she would shout for care and faith
… and life.

- KSC, 2001
Poem written in response to "Misha"

I was really mad at Misha when she left school early in June last year. Actually, I had been getting angrier and angrier at her for the month or two before that – really confused and saddened as I watched the Misha that I knew gradually disappear, only to be replaced by someone who slouched and swaggered a bit when she walked, affected a disaffected, bored look, and pulled a heavy wool tuque down over her head so that only her dark brown eyes showed. It seemed to me that we were losing her somehow, that she had "turned", her enthusiasm and dreams curdling – spoiled by sordid reality somehow. It made me angry to see her stop caring, to stop racing headlong towards life.

Misha was one of those young people who had fallen between the cracks in our public education system. Bright, but with a troubled family history, sixteen year old Misha entered our adult education center like most of our new students, like Morgan who we met earlier – chafing at the bit to get her high school leaving certificate as quickly as possible. But Misha was special. She was different – different from a great number of our students in that she immediately decided that learning was fun, and she approached it with an enthusiasm and a glee that was contagious.

Misha was like a breath of fresh air in our center...and a proverbial whirlwind. Literally speaking, she raced into the classroom, books and papers tumbling every which way, thoughts and words just pouring out of her mouth. Her workstation – which was wherever she seemed to land – was always chaotic, with her sprawling script spilling over onto pages and pages of notes. She often complained that her hand didn't seem able to capture every word she wanted to write. A big grin lit up her face when she talked, and her eyes grew darkly intent when she listened. She never seemed able to sit still, her entire being totally engrossed in the process of sucking up every bit of information she could, as quickly as possible.

In short, Misha was an experience. She was impossibly delightful. We were all bewitched and charmed by her enthusiasm and the quickness of her mind. In less than one month, she had accomplished miracles by finishing two complete courses and huge sections of others. In four months, we all wondered if there would be enough courses to keep her occupied for the entire school year.

It may have been hard to keep up with her, but as her mentor, I was more than pleased to do so. She had wonderfully exciting plans, a well-articulated dream, and a sparkling vision of the future. As she explained it to me in an audio taped recording made in November, 1999 (See Appendix E for a full transcript of this tape. The CD attached to the inside cover of this thesis includes a audio recording of Misha's tape):

> My name is – uh – Misha Foster, and – um – I have a dream. I can see it so clearly right now. Um – I dream of one day living on this big farm – like 2,000 acres and having all these tons of animals like cows, giraffes – everything. Anything I can get. And – um – just not kill them, nothing. They just sit there and get fat. And – um – they don't have to worry about anybody hurting them or anything. Even deer – everything is going to be there, and – um – the farm is going to be so big so that they'll never even see the gate so it's like they won't be in prison or anything.
> And – um – I really want this dream so bad, and well, 2000 acres just does cost a lot so – um – I'm keeping in mind that I need to make a lot of money, like at least a million to buy this, so I am going to make it all the way.

She wanted to save the world. As well as animals, she wanted to help others, emphatically stating

> I'm going to go all the way and I'm going to get – learn as much as possible, get as far as I can, get as much money as I can so I can have my farm and adopt a lot of kids that are on the streets or don't have families or whatever, and I just want to help the world out as much as possible.

She wanted to amount to something and believed that she could do anything she wanted to. She even believed others could, too:

And I believe that I'm going to do it. I might not
change the whole world, but I know I'm going to
change as much as I can, and – um – go as far as I can,
learn as much as I can. If – uh – any human can get
money, become a millionaire, change the world, it's
me.
And I believe that anybody can do this. All they need to
do is get a dream and for sure you can make it.
Anybody can do anything they want to do, and – uh – I
know nobody can stop you...and nobody's going to
stop me.

She was literally flying along, spurred on by the thought of this dream:

I think that this is what will make me happy in my
life...and nothing's going to stop me to get it. And
– um – I am just so motivated ever since I saw this
dream. I just go as fast as I can, do as much as I can,
and – um – I dunno I just – I know that if anybody
can change the world, it's me.

And then, one day, it all seemed to change.

For over a month before she left, Misha seemed to be treading water,

upright yet barely moving. She appeared to have given up. She stopped

attending classes regularly, and when she did, it was as if she were barely there.

Dark circles appeared under her eyes and she seemed thinner than ever.

Thoughts of anorexia and/or drug use occurred to me. I worried about her. I

asked if there was anything wrong. I asked – no, I *nagged* – her about the work

she was supposed to have done. She began to skip our regular mentoring

appointments. I asked for explanations. I watched her carefully, as if looking for

clues to her mysterious behavior. I felt she was letting both of us down, and I

resented it – but felt powerless to do anything about it. She took to avoiding me

whenever she could, as if she sensed my disappointment and hurt.

I withdrew. Angrily. Bitterly.

When I think of it now, I'm so ashamed of myself that I cringe. Just what right did I have to react so badly?! Exactly why was I so angry? Who was I really angry at? Just what went wrong? Could I have changed something at the time?

"Just where do you think you're going?"...

I look at the situation now and I can see that I had fallen into the very dangerous trap of caring more for the vision that I had of Misha than for the flesh and blood person herself. I had actually begun to believe in someone who did not exist, had painted a picture of a student whose enthusiasm, intelligence and idealism not only matched, but had even exceeded my own, and I had gotten so caught up in that private fantasy that I couldn't see the reality of the individual anymore.

No one – not even Misha – could have kept up the type of blatant enthusiasm she had exhibited, but I had allowed myself the luxury of believing that she could, of fancying myself the one teacher who had somehow drawn her out, and inspired her – had awoken her from her daze. I had become a Pygmalion, a self-appointed "savior" – and I almost felt as if I had actually invented her somehow, had made her up and breathed life into her. I had all but forgotten that she was a real, normal person, a young but insecure adult – so wrapped up was I in the bright vision I had created of who and what I wanted her to be.

Because I was so committed and passionate about our relationship and so very excited by what I saw as the good work she was doing, I ended up assimilating Misha's vision and vibrant potential into my own vision, rather than honoring her distinct gifts and talents. I was so intrigued by her dream that I began to believe in it more than she did. Worse, my pride got the best of me: I let others know about the dream – quietly, as if it were all my own doing. I literally overshadowed Misha, and unknowingly squashed the emerging adult self she was becoming. Because I was more involved and concerned with this shadow Misha, I was not open to the problems the real Misha was facing. I did not look, did not really see. I wasn't ready to hear what she might have been trying to say to me. I became like all the other adults she had had dealings with: bossy, judgmental, concerned about all the wrong things. No wonder she started shying away from me.

Of course, I didn't understand all this at the time, and I became resentful. At home, I catalogued all the hours I had spent with her, helping her along. I begrudged the missed lunches and late afternoons we had spent talking. I thought about all the books I had lent her, the confidences I had shared, the sage advice I had given her. I was angry to think that I had wasted all my very precious time on an ungrateful little girl when I could have spent it on others – more deserving others – or on myself. Even so, my ego was unable to write her off quite so easily. I was sure that something horrible must have happened to her to have made her change so much last spring and that, after a summer spent thinking about it and missing me, she would see reason.

What I couldn't see at the time was that this was displaced anger – anger that I directed at another which should have been directed at myself. That small still voice inside me was quietly insistent. It murmured, but I wasn't listening. If I had, I would have been devastated. In my dealings with Misha I had denied every single one of my core values. I hadn't treated Misha as an adult at all. In fact, everything I had done practically from the moment she had walked into my classroom had inadvertently underlined the fact that I wasn't sure that she was capable of managing her own learning. Unwittingly, I belittled her accomplishments by pointing out their cleverness with the pride and glee of a mother of a precocious tot. And, of course, she had anxiously tried to please me by doing more. When she began having difficulties, instead of talking *with* her I spoke at her, nagging her as if I didn't trust her to manage her own life. I refused to listen. I accepted no excuses. I gave her no quarter. I gave her no real respect.

I remained resentful all that summer. When school started in the fall, I half-hoped that I'd run into the Misha I knew, but instead found myself looking at a virtual stranger with long, straggly hair and a defiant look, a person who refused to co-operate, someone who insisted that she be allowed to skip the class I taught in literature because she "knew all that stuff already". In fact, this new person even went so far as to say that, if she weren't allowed to do it her way, she would drop out of school. We stared at each other – at a real impasse – before I turned on my heel and stalked away. Oh, I let her get her way, all right, but I was ungracious enough to have another teacher arrange her schedule and

work with her. I wasn't prepared to have this person in my classroom.

"Just where do you think you're going?"...

What I really wasn't prepared to have in my classroom was someone who would force me to confront myself and to make me honor the core values that I said I had. I wasn't prepared for the flesh and blood Misha who would remind me that I had failed as a mentor. I also wasn't prepared for a more mature, more adult Misha – a Misha who had been growing more into herself over the summer, a Misha who did, indeed, have a bit more of an idea of who she was and what it was she wanted to learn, and how she wanted to learn it.

I had often told myself that I believed that each one of us holds the keys to what it is we truly want to learn and how we can best do that – and that, accordingly, we can all learn how to design and direct our own learning. I had stated that I felt that all students are capable of growth, and are capable of moving from a type of learning which is solely teacher-directed to a more autonomous and self-directed learning style. But I simply wasn't prepared to demonstrate that particular core value in my classroom with Misha, nor did I seem able with Misha to honor the core value of treating every one of my students as a functioning, capable adult with her. I could not even recognize that her dream was her own personalized vision of success, thereby denying yet a third of my core values – that although many students may view academic progress as "success", I believed that there are other ways of becoming successful.

I had always stated that I had seen my mandate as helping my students to become successful human beings (according to their own definition) as well as achieving learners, so why wasn't I willing to let Misha define her own "progress" and "success"? Why did I somehow let her know that her definitions were not good enough?

I have often wondered why I found living my core values so difficult when I was working with Misha. It seemed easier to stay close to my values in working with other students.

Approximately two months went by with Misha and I studiously avoiding direct contact with each other. Then, early one wintry morning, Misha appeared at my classroom door to ask if she could use the phone. She looked tired and a bit thinner, but there was still something in those eyes that spoke volumes. While she waited to be connected, it finally dawned on me that I was being given a marvelous chance to re-establish communication with her, to redeem myself in my own eyes, to stop feeling hurt and sorrowful about the situation and to act like the person I wanted to be. So, before she had a chance to bolt out the door, I heard myself asking her if she could stay for a minute or two because we really hadn't had much of a chance to talk. Even though she shrugged and barely sat down, I cleared my throat and blurted out the first question which came to mind – "Is the dream still alive?", I croaked. She nodded, and then began to speak, her voice wobbling in curves...

I guess I had always known, or suspected, that her home life was miserable. Her file from the local high school had mentioned it several different times, underlining the different phone numbers and addresses at which to contact family or guardians, but other than that very little was actually said. Like many of our students, Misha's home life was quite complicated, to say the least. Her story, though, was slightly different and very sad – one of those stories that parents of teenagers quietly talked about among themselves.

Misha came from a family that had disintegrated rapidly upon the tragic death of one of her older sisters – a teenaged girl who was run over by a car while playing "chicken" by lying down in the middle of the road. In her inebriated state, she hadn't noticed the oncoming speeding car, and the alcohol both she and her friends had imbibed had made it virtually impossible for anyone to be able to help. Neither parent ever recovered from this event. They separated soon after the funeral. As well, and perhaps because they were so caught up in their own grief, neither parent seemed to notice that young five-year-old Misha had also been severely affected by the sudden departure of her idolized older sister – much more so than her other sisters. And, oddly enough, no one from either the family or the community seemed to feel that counseling might have been in order. Misha still sleeps with her sister's favorite plaid shirt and cuddles the teddy she owned. These are the only things that she says she really values.

Misha's life became one of being shuttled back and forth between parents who would keep her for an undetermined amount of time and then would suddenly announce that it was time for her to leave. By eight or nine she often

stayed out all night. By ten she was drinking beer; by eleven she had turned to the harder stuff. At the age of twelve, her odd behavior and unusual manner of dressing – she informed me that she still isn't sure where all of her clothes are, so she just keeps the ones she's wearing until she can find something else – finally attracted a certain amount of attention at school, and she was taken for tests. She was found to be clinically depressed and put on an antidepressant.

Around this point in her life Misha took things into her own hands. She decided that her parents didn't especially seem to want her around. She didn't fit in anywhere. There were other siblings – one older and one younger – who were either more tractable or adaptable and who her parents always kept with them, but Misha seemingly annoyed both parents after a certain amount of time. She finally moved in with one of her friends and became part of that family. Parents of six children already, these people could ill afford to feed another child, but they accepted her as one of their own, and took her in for several months at a time. They continue to offer her hospitality and love whenever she appears on their doorstep, and she refers to them as her family – even when all appears to be going well with her birth parents. She is, however, very much aware of the lack of money these people have, and is often reluctant to saddle them with yet another mouth to feed – even if she has nowhere else to go. Having no place to stay is frequently a problem, but she shrugs it off as if it were a normal occurrence for a person her age.

As well, for some reason or another, obtaining her medication has been a constant problem. Certainly, this prescription is expensive, but Misha is still a

minor and eligible for Medicare benefits. Her mother, legally in charge of her at the time we were speaking, seemed to be experiencing difficulties in purchasing the drug the Misha needs to keep her mood swings on an even keel. Misha quietly confided that she spends a lot of energy trying to stay in control and on top of things.

And yet, in spite of all this upheaval in her own personal life, she was still willing and anxious to learn. Her spirit may have been bent and frayed a bit, but it was definitely not broken, and her enthusiasm for life was still, somehow, evident. She was determined to find a job and earn the money to make a home for herself. The free use of the phone was what had led her to my classroom.

It disappoints me to think that I had somehow allowed my ego and my controlling personal pride to dictate my actions, to blind me to the actual person she was: a young seventeen-year-old without a stable home life, a relatively penniless young woman who was desperately trying to pay for a place of her own – and an adolescent who also wanted to be "normal", to be part of a group of people her own age...and to have some sort of fun in spite of it all. All I saw was what I wanted to see: a bright and malleable young woman with dreams and an appetite for life.

Because I was so fond of her and wanted her to "make it" in life, I failed to grasp that what I was actually doing in our mentoring sessions was telling her how to lead her life, that I was telling her in so many words that I would not like her as much if she didn't do it my way. She hadn't wanted to disappoint me like

she felt she had disappointed others. She had desperately wanted and needed my approval – *but I had attached strings to my friendship.*

Somewhere along the line I had been so intrigued by her dream that I had decided that the fairy tale-like vision she had outlined to me early on in our relationship was to be her overall consuming passion, the dream that was to be her vision and her life's purpose. I hadn't bothered consulting her and hadn't even verified whether the dream really mattered or not – until much, much later. Not many of the young adults I work with seem to have dreams that they openly embrace. They are too filled with the business of living, of dealing with the many emergencies that seem to come their way, of having to face responsibilities that younger adults shouldn't necessarily have to face: parenthood, abuse, money problems, family violence. Dreams seem to be low on their priority list – probably because they have experienced a bigger need to be down to earth and practical.

In all fairness, finding a dream to build your life around is not easy. It may not even be necessary. But to me, the idea of a dream and a vision by which you can live your life is a very seductive and comforting thought. It has been a major part of my own life and has given me a stability and a challenge that has kept me whole. The fact that Misha had a dream surprised and delighted me. The fact that it seemed to be motivating her so well and so early on in her academic career made me assume that this particular dream would be like mine – a bit more permanent. Then, again, maybe the dream had another function, after all...

Misha and I talked for a long time that afternoon – or, rather, Misha did. For once, I listened with every part of my being. Then, with a shrug that I was

beginning to realize was characteristic of her and a part of the way she handled life, she was off.

I didn't run into her for another week, but when I did she told me she had left something for me on my desk. I practically ran to see what it was. It was a crayoned drawing of a black flower – a rose, perhaps? – highlighted, surrounded by dark red (Figure VIII). It shimmered, catching the light in my dim classroom.

I have often wondered what Misha wanted to tell me with this picture. Certainly, it means something that I am probably missing, but which for now I am content to let go. I think I have had quite enough of second-guessing people, enough of trying to put my own values and meanings on to other people and things. But I love it, and it has a special place in my study at home where I do all my work. Like Misha, it is special. Like Misha, it may well defy definition. And maybe that's all I need to know.
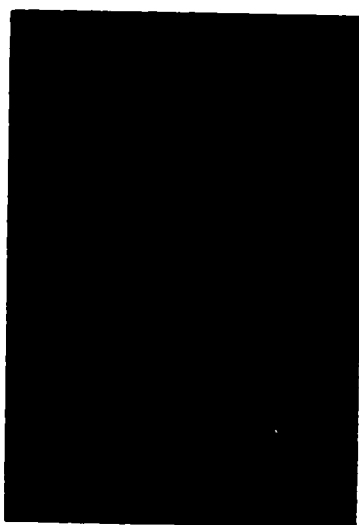
Figure VIII. Misha's flower drawing.

I can't take back or undo what I did with Misha, nor can I ever go back to being who I was, to doing what I used to do; instead I must forever go on – forward – with self-questions and self-renewal, constantly challenging my own complacency. The struggles and failures with students like Misha are painful but important reminders that I will ever need to re-think assumptions, and constantly re-examine my practice in order to become more like the mentor I want and need to be, transforming myself and what it is I do to correspond more closely with that acknowledged ideal.

CHAPTER SIX

Trying to Live Joyfully, Compassionately and Empathically

The Jewel

There is this cave
in the space behind my body
that now nobody will be able to touch
a cloister a silence
closing around a blossom
of fire
Now when I stand
upright against the wind
my bones turn to dark garnet

Image of Mentoring 6.

(watercolor and construction paper collage)
-ksc, 1999

Learning to Live, Teach, and Learn with Joy: A mentor's personal
history and struggle

Self-doubt, fear and an identity

"Just where do you think you 're going? "...

I often ask myself what I am doing here, teaching and mentoring. In part, I
suppose, this incessant questioning stems from my fear – the fear that has
surfaced so frequently throughout this thesis – that I won't be a good mentor, that
I won't be able to overcome my personal foibles and deal with the people in my
care in the manner in which they should be treated. Gently. With love and care.
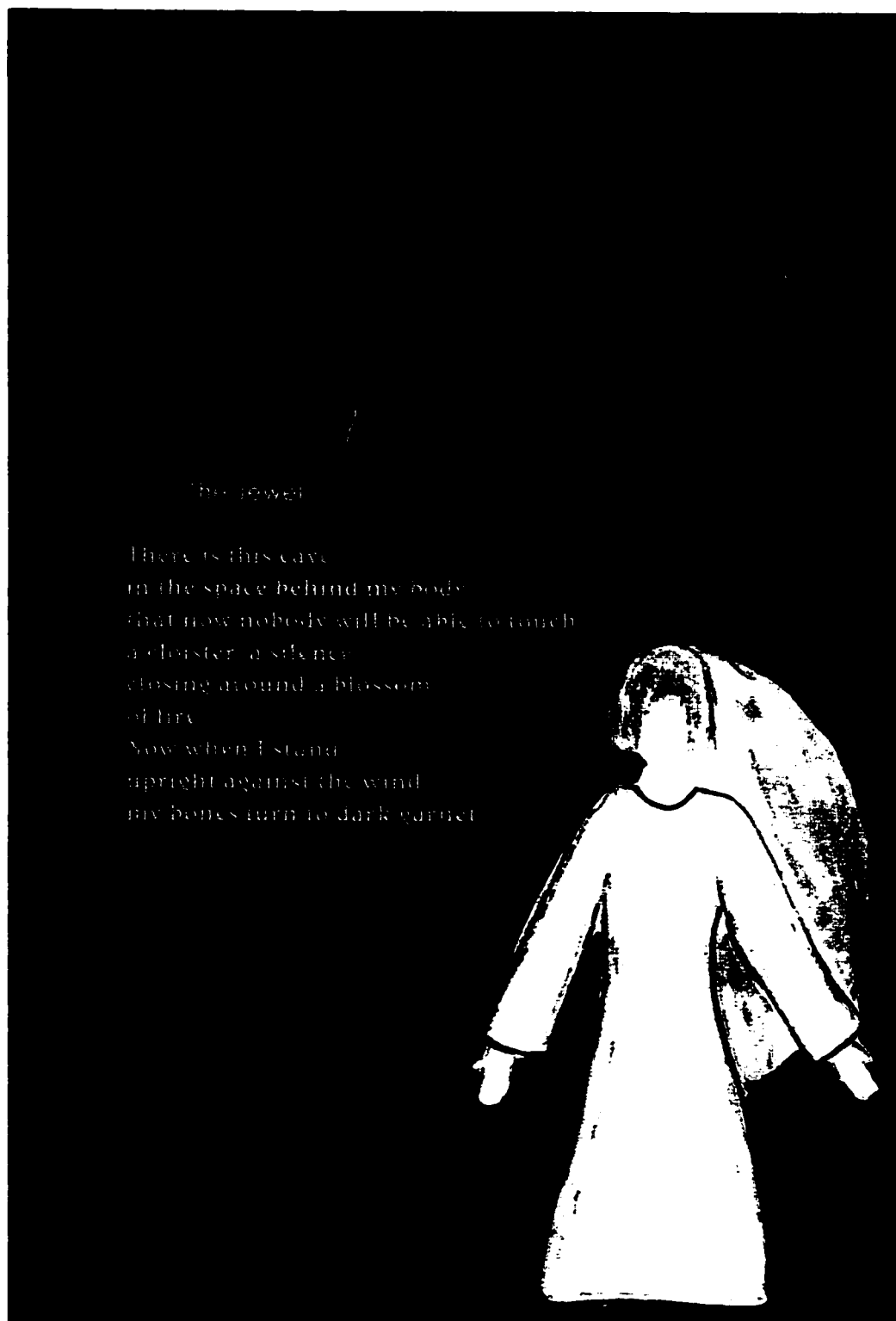With respect and honor. As capable individuals. As well intentioned and skillful,
experienced people.

Even now, towards the end of this self-study, I often seem to fall short of
my professed ideals, my values. I reluctantly realize that this is probably normal
and all right to a certain extent – dreams and visions of excellence are stars to
reach for, but they aren't everyday reality. But there are days like the ones in the
story of Misha when I just blow it, those awful days when I am seemingly
incapable of doing anything right, when I don't seem to be able to live up to a
fraction of my vision. Those are the times when I worry that I may even
unknowingly cause damage to my mentees. It's hard to live up to the values that
I profess to believe and still work in the public school system.

I wonder to what extent I am living my values throughout the school day.
In my mentoring sessions I try to be a good listener, to be patient and

understanding, to see the people I am working with as being worthy of my attention and concern, to see them as becoming who they tell me they want to be, but is that enough? Maybe, just maybe, I need to remember on a deeper level that being a mentor does not stop when I leave the school building; it is part of my very identity – part of who I am and who I am becoming (Weber and Mitchell, 1995). Being the mentor I have chosen to become means I end up wearing my values continually, for all to see whether I go and whatever I do. Mentoring can be so much more than a full time job: it is a vocation. It may well be a life mission.

Sometimes, when there's a bit of a lull in my teaching, I watch my students. So many of them appear to be so passive. They often sit with their heads down on the table, too tired or too defeated by life or education to bother continuing the sham. That's when I ache with ineffectiveness.

What good are the words "honor", "respect", "joy" and "hope" to people who seem to be giving up on life at such a young age? How can I inflame them with ideas and visions of their own personal excellence when so very little about life in general seems to excite them? Even with their own friends, many of these people still don't show tremendous enthusiasm or interest; in fact, most of them seem rather lost.

Indeed, for many of the people in our learning population, there seems to be a generalized belief that life is not fair. Yet they struggle on, for the most part trying to nibble the one carrot held out to them: that a good job and a good life may come their way. They face almost continual disappointment.

Undereducated, unmotivated, uninvolved, and uninterested in the rest of the world, they cling to the rural area in which they live, resisting change and growth if it means taking a chance. This disappointment or unhappiness manifests itself in a variety of ways, but mostly, it causes them to react negatively to life in general and to education in specific. Gary Phillips (1997) brings up the notion that when hurt people like these react in certain ways, teachers shouldn't respond to them in the same way that others always have, or to react in the same emotional vein. Instead, he feels that one should look for the missing emotion in their lives and to try to use that to reach them. After working within the adult system for a number of years, in sorting through the anger and the passivity that I so often encounter, I have come to believe that the common missing emotion in my mentees' lives, may well be joy.

Living and mentoring through pain and joy

Many of them – in fact, most of them – can't or don't believe in joy, and their bewilderment when someone like myself tells them that they are really and truly unique is palpable. Sadly enough, it seems as if they have never experienced any evidence of such positive qualities in their lives before. That's when I begin to wonder what role I play in their lives. Who am I to tell them that they need to believe in things like "joy" and "commitment"? How can I talk to people facing such profound unhappiness and disappointment about the need for them to have an affirmative vision? Who am I to tell people that they need to believe in something strongly enough, to believe in themselves and their abilities, in order to achieve some of those wonderful things in life that we are all

searching for? Am I helping or hindering them? And why have I appointed myself to be the person to give this message? Just who do I think I am?

There is another question whose voice is even more urgent. Why is it often so hard for us to choose joy, even when there are no painful circumstances in our lives? As I look around me, I'm beginning to believe that it's because we simply do not know how to go about it. Being with joy means being stretched, to expand to hold it all. With joy, we are stretched to take in the enormity of it all – ourselves, the world, the Mystery. And this frightens us. Maybe it's because we have been taught that if we have too great a sense of our own "largeness", of our possible grandeur as beings, that we will lack humility or invite dangerous envy.

It seems that joy can scare us much more than pain. Pain is familiar, whereas joy breeds dangerous hope and the potential for disappointment. We are so frightened of the pain of disappointment that we often pick away at what is new and hopeful, anticipating flaws or failures – robbing ourselves of the joy that can lift our spirits. Even worse than that, we also often expect too little joy in life and settle for less than our souls need to flourish.

It's not that we should expect to feel happy every day. In fact, I value that elusive kernel of meaning, that often difficult unfolding of the larger story of life, more than I value fleeting feelings of happiness. But because life is very short and precious, shouldn't we be able to actively search out some happiness, however we can?

It seems to me that we can make any number of good choices to live meaningful, productive, loving lives. Surely, the choices that bring us the most joy

should be – and indeed, will be – the easiest to sustain, will make it possible for us to contribute all that we are able. I really don't think that this is always about making those choices that bring the most immediate gratification. There is a special kind of joy in what is held back and then released in full celebration.

Personally, though, I certainly don't want to have to choose between joys, to choose between that ecstatic rush of feeling that comes in moments that can only be described a pure magic, and those joys that can be readily found in ordinary, day to day moments. I don't think any of us should have to make that choice. I work hard to resist the voices, inner and outer, that tell me I must choose between joys, that I must pick a set that fits a lifestyle.

But, then, I am greedy. I know this. I want it all. I want those small daily joys – I want to celebrate the birthdays, the anniversaries, the graduations, the days well lived – AND I want to experience all of the ecstasy, that vision of oneness that dissolves my boundaries and lets me greet the God that lives within and around me. Yet, I know that I am also truly blessed among women, doubly fortunate because I have had both types of joy...and have been able to recognize them for the gifts that they were and still are.

I truly believe that joy finds us and lifts us in ordinary moments, if we just let it. And I also know deep inside of me that the ecstasy I feel at those moments has that magical, mystical quality of being able to transform and transport me out of this life and into another, making me a better, healthier and happier person.

The reason that I am so vehement about this is that I, too, have had to look for the joy in my life. I now realize that I came to joy early in my life, but that I

never gave much thought to it, accepting it as part and parcel of life. I have always been full of faith, blessed, in fact, by it, yet I wasn't ever fully aware of it, didn't always know it was there or fully acknowledge it. And I might never have had the opportunity to truly re-discover it, had it not been for one overwhelming experience of pain.

Two years ago, I experienced one of the greatest, most devastating losses a human being can experience: the death of one's own child. To put it bluntly, my son's death – caused not by a lingering disease or a car accident but rather, by a careless drug overdose – made me feel as though someone had handed me a grenade with the pin pulled. The resulting explosion in the very center of my life shook everything up, and left me to re-arrange the pieces as best I could. I feel the aftershocks even now, two long yet brief years later.

Learning to deal with the pain, sorrow, and grief of this incident has been a major turning point in my life – both personally and professionally. It has given me deeper insights into sorrow and loss, creating a new and more compassionate sense of empathy within me, awakening a new sensitivity to others, and a more profound appreciation of life in all its ramifications. As well, it has made me far more aware of courage and joy, and of the fact that living and learning with joy must be a conscious choice.

As a mentor, I recognize that what I would like to be able to do is to somehow help others acknowledge that same joy buried deep inside themselves...The question is "How?!".

Dealing with Sorrow

I know that every life has pain and sorrow in it. It's part of being human. It also seems to be part of my job as a mentor working with the type of population that I do. Listening to another telling a story of pain and sorrow is difficult because it makes me touch my own sorrow again.

When I touch my own sorrow, the death of my son, I can literally hear, from the inside, my blood stop and my brain scream as the agonized moan escaped unbidden from the deepest recesses of my being. I taste the salt of my tears and the flatness of life as I felt it then. I feel all of my muscles cramp as I yet again take in the news the policeman tells me. My mind aches like a broken bone as I struggle to stand in the new place I continually find myself. I feel frequently bewildered and unsure of the terrain. I ache for the mother I was.

I can touch this sorrow when I want to, and as contradictory as it may seem to some, I find that deliberately keeping in touch at some level with my pain actually makes me a better mentor. Although to some, it might seem as if I am belaboring my pain, in fact, it is quite the opposite.

I believe that if we are strong enough to permit ourselves to feel deeply, to allow ourselves to unflinchingly enter those darkest caverns of our pain, some of us may be given a wound that never really heals. A wound that is not scabbed over, not covered up, can be a blessing because it can help us to connect to the pain of being human. The pain actually becomes a wonderful, terrible gift, a gift that will keep our hearts open continually.

We are all so very afraid of pain – both the physical and the emotional –

and I think that we really want to believe that there is a way around experiencing our own sorrow. We actually think we can avoid the pain and hurt, and lose absolutely nothing of what life is in all its fullness, in all its joy.

And, it's hard not to move away from pain. When I hear a mentee like "Holly" tell her story of abuse, the bone in the center of my chest aches, my knees want to buckle, and suddenly, I am back there in the living room – deep into my own personal abyss – hearing the policeman's words and feeling my blood stop. This knowledge makes it hard to breathe for a moment.

But, I do breathe, I go on breathing – just as I allow the sorrows of the world, of others, to break my heart over and over again. Knowing how to do this, finding the courage to take another breath, and not close my heart to myself, to another, or to the world where there is pain, is something I am trying to learn to live up to. I am trying to live compassionately. I am trying to learn how to love truly and well. I am trying to believe in joy. Indeed, it is perhaps the shared experience of pain and loss and the resultant thirst for joy that are the secrets that bind me and my mentees together, that make us, for the most part, such a good match.

It is hard to be with another's pain if we cannot be with our own. In order to be able to do this, we need to create safe places and spaces for our authentic selves, because accepting ourselves and the pain that we feel, seems to require more courage than most of us think we possess. I suppose that that may be so – in a very few people's cases – but I believe that the spirit to grow and to live life fully exists in each one of us. We need to believe in it and then look for it.

The problem with looking for joy and happiness is that many times we are grieving for something, and we may not even be aware of it. Grief is long-term pain. It leaves us frightened, angry, and lonely – encumbering us with an anguish from which there seems no deliverance or relief. Yet, grief needn't be solely the result of the big shocks, the large pains. Grief can come from a number of sources. One of these sources – at least the one that I often see my mentees experiencing – is the grief that comes about from making a significant change in one's learning and from experiencing the loss of certainties in one's life (Scott, 1997; Taylor, 2000). Far from being the exhilarating and liberating process that we educators feel that this experience should be, the change required by learning something new is profoundly unsettling for many people who quite prefer to cling to the well-known nooks and crannies of their own existence. There is often a very profound sense of trepidation and a real grieving for what can now be seen to be truly and definitively "lost" for ever. Life for these people may never be the same again – and in their pain and confusion, they mourn.

Like pain, grief is sudden, shocking and sharp. But grief is more; it is a cortege that crawls through time. There's no pretending that we can skirt the procession – at some point we will be dragged into the parade to inch along with fellow mourners. In the aloneness of grief, we need to respect and listen to our surviving soul. We need to look for the joy we can find there.

One of the most common outcomes of pain, sorrow, and grief can be bitterness. The idea of growing bitter is one of the few things that really frightens me. Bitterness. The very word is like something to be spat out, a nasty taste that

must be eradicated before any other flavor can be admitted or savored. Bitterness is like a scream unscreamed, something acrid and sinister blocking the throat, a disaster waiting to happen.

When we can't let go of bitterness, or overcome past injustices and disappointments, these sources of unhappiness combine to become debilitating. Bitterness is such a negative emotion that if it is taken in and accepted as part of the psyche, deep, permanent scars can develop. I believe that we can consciously and constantly choose not to be bitter. Like those circling paths in the gardens of health care facilities where Alzheimer's patients and other confused people receive treatment, bitterness always brings us back to where we started – and therefore inhibits any meaningful growth.

Constantly choosing joy over sorrow, bitterness and grief requires a major paradigm shift for many of us. It is difficult to make decisions of this nature, especially when we aren't sure of the outcome. And that requires courage.

Sometimes courage involves big questions like whether to live or to die – but it seems to me that often it is about the day-to-day details. When your mind is chock full of memories of times or things past, sometimes it takes courage to look ahead and plan for a future without those people or places. Decisions we make this year as wives, sisters, mothers, or simply as people, have a quirky habit of finding paths back to us. It takes guts to revisit them. It also occurs to me that courage may be about choices, about how we make those choices and how we live with them. Sometimes it takes immense courage to close your eyes and go

to sleep, for fear of waking up in the morning, knowing that all this is real, that your life has changed forever.

"Be of good courage," Isaiah wrote (Is. 41:6) But what *is* good courage? Can there be – is there – *bad* courage? The good might just mean making decisions or choices that are true and right for you – however frightening they may be.

Looking at my practice

When I think of what it is that I do, I like to think that I "do good work", that my teaching and mentoring rests solidly on my beliefs as an individual and as an adult educator. One of my core values is that the human spirit and soul is truly magnificent in its infallibility and grandeur, and in its ability to fly and soar. In my role as mentor I would like to somehow be able to nurture and support that spirituality in all the people that I touch. Although this idea of honoring each individual's spirit may be a difficult value to live up to, it is one that I feel is worth striving toward – and the only way that I think I can demonstrate it is to try to model considerate, respectful, and joyous acceptance of people both in and out of the classroom.

The spirit of true joy should manifest itself in the recognition, celebration, and complete acceptance of each and every person's unique gifts. Specifically, in the context in which I work and learn, this means that, as with Morgan, I need to unquestionably believe in the individual's ability to determine what's best for him/her, and accept that decision gracefully. It means a non-judgmental attitude and the attribution of best motive (Noddings, 1984), an unconditional acceptance

of the fact that what one tells me is true. If I am to truly celebrate the other as an educator and as a mentor, this would mean that I would need to demonstrate unwavering regard for my mentees and students.

Of course, as the stories told here show, that's far easier said than done.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Transformation and Self-study with "Robin"

WHIRRING

These four wings seem
to have grown miraculously
out of gut-wrenching, splitting fear –
and have become a possible freedom
welded onto my body,
now grown lean and hard
with desire and need.

I hear the whirring and
suddenly realize that the ancient wisdom
has become truth:

Only when we hear
our soul's own music,
can we truly fly...

Image of Mentoring 7.

Tales of Transformation

Although I like to think of myself as being fairly savvy and sophisticated, the truth is that I'm not. I am quite naïve. I have always had an incurable romantic, idealistic streak. In spite of all that I've seen and experienced, in spite of losing Jamie, I still believe in fairy tales and happy endings. I honestly believe that people are essentially kind and capable and can and will help each other, and, that in the course of living our lives, our gifts and talents will naturally emerge and be put to good use – especially if given the proper environment and encouragement. I became a teacher and a mentor in part because of that belief system.

Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that to me, any account of mentoring should lead directly to a tale of transformation.

Nature abounds with examples of seemingly miraculous transformation and growth. The "ugly duckling" cygnet is a clumsy, gawky looking bird that grows into the majestic trumpeter swan, and the insignificant aquatic guppy of a tadpole actually sprouts limbs and loses its tail to become an impressive bullfrog. The dramatic transformation of a "joey" into the large red kangaroo is surely the stuff of fairy tales: from its birth as a pink wriggling fetus no more than an inch or two in length, this creature blindly makes the epic journey from the vulva from which it has emerged all the way into its mother's pouch, where it then attaches and feeds – only to materialize, much, much later, as one of nature's most unusual and indomitable creatures.

Some of the most startling metamorphoses seem to come from the insect world. The transformation of the caterpillar into the dazzling butterfly is a fascinating process – as is the lifespan of the Mayfly, an insect that spends two to three years submerged as an aquatic bug and then bursts forth into a winged being, who flits, flies, and lives gloriously for only one day – just long enough to lay eggs.

My particular personal favorite is the dragonfly, a beautiful, shimmering long-bodied flying creature that is often referred to by a number of descriptive names, and is celebrated in poetry perhaps more than any other insect. The dragonfly, like so many others in the insect family, does not start out life with wings. Instead, it begins life as a nymph, a grotesque, rapacious aquatic living thing that inhabits fresh water. The nymph breathes oxygen by sucking water into its gills, which are located in a chamber in its lower intestine. However, this chamber has another, very different function. It also serves as a unique kind of jet propulsion: the nymph sends itself forward by expelling water through its rectum.

When the time is right, the nymph leaves the water, its skin splits, and it becomes the adult dragonfly – an insect that embodies flying quicksilver. This glorious, large iridescent four-winged bug is an ingenious, swift hunter that scoops up large quantities of small insects like mosquitoes and gnats in a basket formed by its six legs as it flies through the air. Its ability for quick, darting and long-sustained flight also makes it unique, and amply qualifies it as the strongest flier among insects. Like the trumpeter swan, the bullfrog, the kangaroo, the

butterfly, and the Mayfly, the dragonfly began life as something quite insignificant and grew into a truly wonderful being.

All of this is by way of showing that transformation and growth can be found in the unlikeliest of places. These are everyday miracles – but they are miracles all the same, to be treasured and revered for the marvels that they are. I feel that way about my mentees. Take, for example, the following story about one of my mentees, a young woman who I will here call "Robin".

I really enjoy watching my students to see what kind of clues they inadvertently send me about who they really are. I spend a lot of time watching them for that very reason. The trick to observing students is not to let them catch you watching them too often. It makes them uncomfortable, and will often scare them away – and it makes me, at least, feel funny to be caught out in what seems to be a sort of voyeuristic behavior even though I know it is a mentoring professional's gaze.

The first time that Robin walked into my class, I thought I saw her eyes flash for the briefest of seconds. Then, it was gone – the eyes quiet, demure and shielded behind her glasses. I was intrigued. Generally, students seem to respond quite favorably to me, but Robin didn't seem to care. She was polite, careful to laugh at my jokes, asked for help when she needed it, and listened attentively to me when I offered advice – but that was it. Nothing more. Her demeanor in class was perfectly correct, if not slightly aloof, and she seemed to maintain a discreet distance from the other students. She was smart, neatly dressed, pretty – and she had attitude.

I often wondered about her. She had come to adult education sector in the middle of the academic school year, which was a bit unusual, yet there was nothing about her that I had heard or could see that indicated a particular behavior problem. She had mentioned that she was sick of the local high school, but hadn't volunteered anything else, so I had let it go at that. But why then, halfway through the school year? Why leave and have to start the school year all over again? From what I could see, outside of class she appeared to be a bit of a loner, although she often engaged herself in deep conversations with one or two others – but never more. In class, she was a very competent student, more than capable of completing even the most difficult English assignments – but there was something missing, something that I couldn't put my finger on. I finally concluded that she didn't seem to be captivated by anything, and I realized that I had never really seen her excited or passionate about anything – academic or otherwise. In fact, nothing seemed to faze her, or touch her in any way that I could determine.

In the first month and a half of English, she whizzed through the first part of her English course without missing a beat – and without revealing anything of real importance about herself. After watching her closely for a while and trying to engage her in conversations that consisted of more than "Hi, how are you?", it finally struck me that Robin might be waiting for something or someone – I wasn't sure which.

We spend much of our time waiting. Many of us are waiting for something to happen. Waiting by its very nature traps us in a way of living and reacting that

can make much of what it is we do — and our lives — superficial and disappointing. In fact, we may spend so much of our lives waiting that we never discover the true joy of living on purpose and with purpose, of integrating who we are with what we do. I wondered what Robin could be waiting for.

A few months went by. By then Robin had found a niche in our school and I had stopped watching her quite so intently. I still couldn't figure her out, but I decided that it didn't matter. Perhaps that nagging feeling I had had about her was wrong. Maybe everything was fine, and the glimmer I had seen in her eyes that first day I saw her had been a trick of the light. I reviewed her progress sheet. Robin had been doing quite well in her English from the moment she had enrolled in our school, but in the past month I had not received any work from her although we had spoken briefly several times about the research unit. I wondered what was up.

After a few classes of watching her, I wondered what she was doing. She appeared to be working, but didn't seem to be producing anything that satisfied her. I had a strong feeling that we needed to talk, but decided that I would let Robin take the lead. I waited for another week. It felt wrong. Whatever it was that I had noticed glinting in Robin's eyes all those months before finally impelled me to act. I decided not to wait any longer.

Perhaps timing is everything. At the time when she should have been well into the research unit of her final English course and poised to complete English altogether, Robin was floundering — quietly, but devastatingly. She had gotten to the point where she was becoming unproductive and unmotivated. She would

express an interest in researching certain topics and then switch them a day or two later. The excuses varied, but her malaise was evident: she was bored and totally unengaged. When we finally got a chance to talk about it, it took a long time for me to finally ask the one question that I thought I had already asked, "What do you really care about?"

I really thought that I had already asked Robin that question in our sessions together, but if I had, I hadn't listened hard enough – or maybe she hadn't really told me. This time, I asked, she spoke, and I heard. The answer was so simple that it was profound – and unusual in a younger adult. She said that she valued herself.

As I listened to her answer, it occurred to me that a self-study might be exactly the type of thing that Robin might enjoy. The only problem was that, even though I was embarking on my own self-study, I really wasn't all that sure of how to help her begin or even how to help anyone else to do it. I wasn't even sure that this type of thing would be sanctioned by the MEQ curriculum – but that has rarely bothered me in the past, so I said a quiet little prayer to the god or goddess who looks after all foolish mentors and teacher researchers, and plunged right in and proposed the project to her. She was fascinated by the idea and completely captivated by the notion that she could investigate herself as if she were a subject of great interest. I not only assured her that she could, but let her know that that was exactly what I was doing as a part of my Masters thesis. Her eyes sparkled and I could already see her beginning to think about the next step, narrowing the whole thing down so that she could determine her question, trying

to figure out what to look at first. We spoke a little bit longer about what types of things might constitute data, and what could be considered as 'evidence', and then arranged to meet the next morning so that I could give her a couple of books and articles to read. Two seconds later, she was racing back to her table to jot down a couple of ideas before the day ended. Watching her head bent over her paper, I thought so far, so good. I only hoped we weren't both grabbing at straws.

"Just where do you think you're going?"...

The next morning Robin was in my classroom bright and early, sipping at a large Tim Horton's coffee container – long before most of the staff had even arrived. She lived a long way from school, and had been unable to get a space on the school bus and so was dependent on a friend of her mother's to take her to school. Usually arriving a bit before eight o'clock in the morning, Robin loved the extra hour she got to herself before classes began. An early bird myself, I, too, relished that quiet time. It became a space that we carved out in our busy lives to be able to meet and talk, and it gave us precious uninterrupted moments where we could just sit together. It also started what was to become a pattern for working on Robin's self-study. Sure enough, for at least three mornings a week for the next couple of months I would arrive, unlock my room and unpack my briefcase, and there she would be – Tim Horton cup in hand. Whenever I think of Robin, that's one of the images that comes immediately to mind.

That morning, unsure of exactly where to begin or how to help her focus, I had brought a couple of books on self-study, narrative, and methodology in

general – books from my personal library that I was consulting for information on my own work at university. As I turned them over to her, I remember wondering what had ever possessed me to think a high school student might be interested in reading books like this, but Robin had seemed to be different. I was thrilled by the way she took them and began to flip through them while we talked because she didn't seem to be looking as much for content, for answers, as she was for process – for a framework within which to structure her own information.

We finally decided to begin with the questions that most teacher researchers ask themselves, some of those basic questions that I had first been given to help me focus on my own research:

- *What do you want to know?*
- *Why?*
- *What do you already know?*
- *How do you know it?*

Some of her immediate responses involved her perception of herself as always having been different and having felt differently than other girls her age – her notes from our first meeting, November 28, 2000, list those qualities as "creative, self-reliant, amaginative" and "trusting" ("Gibbson", 2001a). As an afterthought, she confided that she was stubborn, determined, and a very private person. As she thought about those perceptions, we brainstormed ways she could gather information on herself to prove or disprove her theory. One of the first we could think of was to interview people she had known for a very long time, namely family and friends, to see whether they could provide evidence to support those perceptions. She decided to begin that very day by asking her two closest friends

to list what they felt were her most outstanding traits, and resolved to interview her mother and her sister to see what anecdotal evidence she could find to "trace [her] uniqueness" (ibid.) We were having such a good time that we were amazed to discover that classes were almost ready to begin. Robin left, but assured me that she would be back as soon as she had some information.

Robin was obviously born to be a researcher. Without my needing to tell her, she kept her own type of research diary and every scrap of paper she had used for documentation (See Appendix F for samples of Robin's diary entries.) As we worked together, both of us experienced a certain sense of excitement about what we were doing: we were breaking new ground, experimenting with a new way of looking at the research unit, and working hands on with the data and artifacts that Robin found. We looked forward to our meetings together, to discovering new things. It was fun and it was grounded in learning. I found that I was able to model some of the research behavior that had been modeled for me by several of my more experienced research partners, and we took digital photos of artifacts, tape-recorded information and discussions of data, looked at questions, and discussed triangulation. (The CD attached to the inside cover of this thesis includes an audio taped recording of two sessions in which Robin discusses her research and examines her data.)

Most importantly, though, we talked – endless conversations that picked up where they had ended, that rambled on through Robin's life and into deeper questions, that involved the sharing and exchanging of photos, of memories, of family anecdotes. We looked at each other's research and made comments and

suggestions, we found paragraphs and chapters in books that seemed to support our evidence and shared them with each other, we speculated on how best to present material. We became research as well as mentoring partners.

In the end, though, there was no question in either of our minds. The work we did together revolved around Robin, her learning and her learning process: what she felt comfortable with, what she was interested in, what she wanted to explore and how she wanted to gather and present her information. Our job in those early stages was to gather as much information, data, evidence as possible. Only Robin would be able to decide what to do with it.

For me, these were heady days. I could sense that things were going well because I knew that I was finally truly facilitating the learning process, and that I was actually modeling the self-directed approach to learning that I wanted to promote and enhance in others. Early on, I realized that I had immediately begun this as an adult relationship with Robin, even though she was fairly young and had left the high school in mid-stream to study with us. As well, I had approached her quite frankly as a fellow learner and treated her as a fellow researcher. Perhaps because of those things she had never behaved in any way other than as an adult. Of course, Robin fervently believed she was different than anyone else and was out to convince others and herself of that. Maybe she was...and maybe I was equally different. Maybe I wasn't doing anything right. Maybe it was because we were both odd men out. Maybe I didn't belong mentoring. Maybe...

Was I totally mad? Just where did I think I was going?

In adult education we like to think of ourselves as helping others become

functioning members of a larger community. Was I then inadvertently slitting my own throat and Robin's, too, by wholeheartedly helping her to celebrate and cement her individuality and private-ness? Would this not alienate her more than she already was from the rest of the learner population? As I had already done with Morgan, I decided that I needed to trust both Robin's and my instincts. Helping Robin to become more aware of who she was in order to determine where she wanted to go made more sense in Robin's case than trying to steer her into belonging to a tribe. Besides, I reasoned, the two shouldn't be mutually exclusive.

Robin's first several pieces of data indicated that she had been fairly right about herself in terms of what others saw. Her friends listed her qualities as being "independent, stubborn, strong willed and opinionated" and "caring, dedicated, has an attitude, inquisitive, fear of being rejected" (ibid.). Yet, Robin felt that there was at least one other side of her that people didn't see, and that the side of herself that she presented to the world didn't reveal. After much thought, Robin decided that she would use this dichotomy of the private and the public and build on to start the body of her research paper, going back to her primary school days where she felt it all began:

> In the eye of the public, the [Robin Gibbson] that most people believe they see, is this snobby little girl with an attitude. They think I am better than everyone else, like a rich brat who receives everything she wants with the snap of her fingers. These people, fellow students, see me walking in the halls and automatically do not want to spark up a conversation with me. I guess I don't have a friendly face, and people are afraid.
> My friends, who see the public me, think that I don't have a single care in the world. When I am not walking with my head

high, I choose to take it easy, nice and calm. The public aspect of me is very sarcastic. I will try to make a joke out of anything, just to relieve any tension within myself.

All of my little "public" characteristics began in primary school... Primary school was the beginning of my public face. The snobby little character that most see, isn't in fact a lie, it is what they see because that is what I want them to see...this is the reason why I wear my public mask...

("Gibbson", 2001b, pp. 1-2)

The power of this writing indicates just how sure Robin herself was about finding her "hook" on writing her self-study. Her focus became trying to find evidence to support or topple her claim that her public side of being sarcastic, snobby, and determined, was a mask to protect her private side, which she saw as being highly creative, self-reliant and imaginative.

At the time, though, the writing was in its earliest stages. But I knew that what was happening was good – and not just for Robin or for me. Members of the class saw research data and artifacts being collected, selected and manipulated. Many of them now point to the beginning of Robin's research as the moment in time when they started thinking about what they wanted to do for their research project.

As well, the power of the work I saw Robin doing stilled my self-taunt, the refrain within me. I no longer asked what I was doing or where I was going. I just went. It was a freeing experience, so much so that I knew without questioning myself how I – as a mentor, a fellow, researcher and a friend – should handle the situation when Robin suffered what she felt was a major setback.

Robin had always thought that she was very creative and imaginative and

had been using artifacts from a pretend game that she and her sister used to play to support her claim. Although Robin's sister had usually played this game with her for a while, she very quickly tired of things and Robin would carry on all by herself, spending hours and hours playing "lawyer". We had both been so pleased by the artifacts: there were all sorts of letters, files, business cards and the like which she as a "lawyer" had written and used. The thought that a child her age had wanted to become a lawyer and then had produced so many pieces of evidence to corroborate and support this identity was incredible. We were both convinced of her creative nature.

Robin was, understandably, devastated to discover in late January (when she had all but written her final draft) that the idea to become a lawyer had never been hers – but her sister's. Her sister, like the older child she was, had wanted to be the judge. Robin had had to settle for being a lawyer, and so she had.

In her distress and absolute certainty that all the evidence pointed to her being nothing but a stupid pawn, Robin came to me. She had scrawled on one of her papers: "...*sister is like a directer and I'm the character*" ("Gibbson", 2001a). Knowing that pretending nothing was wrong wouldn't work and that it would be intellectually dishonest, I debated trying to figure a way out of it for her and then stopped. When was I going to learn?

For a fraction of a second I thought I heard that refrain start, and then realized that Robin already had her answer. She had written it herself. I looked at it and then back up at Robin. It all fit – all the evidence had been pointing to this all the time, but we hadn't seen it – Robin *was* creative and had most

certainly been creative throughout her childhood, but not in the way that we had thought. I paused, because I knew that this had to be her call. If she saw the evidence as toppling her claim, I could see that she might be ignoring something very important about herself, as well as her relationship with her sister, but I trusted her judgment as a researcher. I had to do that – or go back to hearing the refrain all the time.

She was only a couple of (long) seconds behind me. She could see what she had really known all along, deep inside: Robin's creativity springs from her role-playing, from her ability to take an idea and bring it to life. That is a special gift, indeed. And she finally realized it. As she explains it:

> There was this game that was introduced by my sister, where we ran a law firm. I was the younger sister, therefore I wasn't able to be the big bold judge, I had to settle with the second best, a lawyer. Even though I had to settle with the cheesy lawyer, I learnt to love the character. I gave that role my heart and believe me, I played that game for hours. I played for hours completely alone and never did I get bored. I filled out important papers, gave my signature, and made telephone calls. I was a highly respected lawyer...
>
> ("Gibbson", 2001b, p. 3)

I was just about in tears of pride and happiness when she presented her research to an audience made up of her fellow classmates and a couple of teachers. She was magnificent: Robin playing Robin for all to see. Reading her self-study, I felt a stab of jealousy that she should be able to write so poignantly, so well. She had managed to put into words a lot of what I had felt myself:

> My reflections, creations and ideas hold a final purpose. They hold my future. This self-study made me face some of the most difficult aspects in my life. I now know that I must indulge a

little more of myself to the public. I need to let the public discover how beautiful I am on the inside. Studying my inner child reminded me, that I am extremely talented, and that I have the potential to accomplish anything I wish. My private life influences me to become aware of my feelings, and act upon them. My over all view is that I may never completely understand myself, and that is more than enough for me now...

(ibid., p. 11)

Mentoring, as a part of teaching, shares most of its characteristics. One of the annoying parts of the job is that – unlike other service professions like medicine and the law – even if you do your job well, there may no obvious results. If, for example, doctors are good at what they do, they can prescribe various types of medicine or they can operate, and their patients will probably recover. In a like manner, lawyers who do their jobs well, through knowledge of the law and judicious application of courtroom techniques, can win their cases. Good teachers and mentors, on the other hand, may never know if they've done anything right – or, if they have, they may not know what it was that they actually have done that was right.

For many of us, the teaching profession is somewhat like groping in the dark for the light switch at the bottom of the landing: we know that it's there, but we can't always put our fingers on it right away. When we find it, we're not so much surprised as we are "confirmed" somehow, and we always promise

ourselves that we'll be able to find it again. Some us continue to go down those stairs in the dark no matter what. I think it's a matter of faith.

If Zack was my "aha! experience", Morgan my first real attempt at trying to align values with mentoring, Holly my full-hearted exploration of the use of "non-academic" techniques like visualization, and Misha the proverbial skeleton in the closet where I seemingly did nothing right, then Robin is a example of what mentoring can achieve. The only problem is that – unlike the other examples – I honestly don't know what it is that I did right, and I wonder if I can ever do it again.

Lessons my mentees have taught me

"Just where do you think you're going?"...

Throughout the course of this self-study, I have learned a great many things about myself, about my mentees, and about my mentoring practice. Most of them could probably be summed up thusly: nothing is as easy as it seems or as we would like it to be. There is a great deal more to mentoring and sustaining a mentoring relationship than meets the eye. That said, the paradox of this situation is that mentoring may not be quite as difficult as I sometimes dscribe it or believe it to be. I have come to realize that much of the difficulty I have perceived in mentoring has been my insistence on the importance of living up to the ideal visions of mentoring that I have. Now I need to ask if I somehow don't lose sight of the distinction between an ideal and a viable reality. It is the vision of mentoring that I pursue that motivates me and energizes me anew each day. But

it is the lived reality of mentoring that I need to honor. I need to accept that falling short of an ideal does not mean losing faith in it.

In reviewing my work as a mentor over the past three years, what have I learned? Among other things, I see the need to:

- become aware of and closely examine the unconscious cultural and professional messages and sub-texts that I send to my mentees;

- acknowledge the importance of mentees' voices by providing more opportunities and strategies for critical reflection so that those voices can grow and be heard;

- place the emphasis squarely on the mentoring relationship and on the shared learning that is its major characteristic;

- remember that all of the above pertains to me in my own growth as well.

Learning to suspend my own unvoiced agenda – to let go of any and all expectations that I hold as a teacher – may be quite difficult for me. In my zeal as a teacher – that is, in my love for learning and in the inherent value that I put on all things academic – I may not be aware of the long shadow that I inadvertently cast. One of the very important things that I have learned from this self-study is that even though I have this need to teach, I need not teach just what it is that I believe: there is so much room for others to grow that I shouldn't confine them to my way of thinking. Instead of pointing only to my (exemplary) beliefs about the importance of learning, I should be modeling the very kind of open curiosity and receptiveness to the world and life, and to learning about growth that I profess to

believe. When I look back at the mentees whose stories I have told, I realize that it was only with Robin that I managed to transcend my subtexts as a teacher. With Robin there was no talk about CEGEP or going further in school – no talk about what I felt she should be doing or where she should be going. Without those particular expectations placed on her, she functioned beautifully. I need to trust my mentees more.

I also need to take some pages from my own book by allowing my mentees more opportunities to express themselves on a variety of subjects without worrying about whether they will make "mistakes" in judgment. To believe in someone is to allow that person to grow through failures and mistakes. We do not learn to speak unless we are encouraged to do so, nor do we learn how to think without practice. Many wonderful people allowed me to rant and rave on about things and listened patiently to me as I verbally and mentally explored topics. I became more confident and willing to express my own opinions because of those people. I wonder whether I have been asking my mentees big enough questions, questions that will give them the kind of practice in formulating responses and in giving their own opinions. My experience with Morgan showed me that teachers and our school system in general believe that they – we – are asking those big questions, but that they – we – in reality aren't. Respect for the individual should include a wondering about life's big questions and a serious consideration of the individual's reaction and response to them.

In my desire to help, to be a good mentor, I must constantly guard against forgetting an essential item – my mentees. Because of their varying

backgrounds, no single plan pertaining to all of them can ever be possible – and, because of their understandable insecurities regarding education and learning, they need to be constantly consulted as well as heard. I need to remember that every mentoring relationship is so very different than any other, and that it is the particularity of each relationship that really matters. Most especially, when I help them to develop a vision, I need to keep in mind that wider context of life that my mentees must live in. I worry that I could get too carried away with myself and my own plans, that I must not let my own ideas about who these people can be blind me to who they really are and their own ideas of who they want to be and where they want to go. This is their life journey, and I must respect the map that they draw for themselves, and the choices that they make...and I must do so gracefully. Working with all my mentees, but especially with Misha and Holly, has been a "reality check" for me and hopefully has provided the basis for my growth in learning that particular mentoring lesson.

Finally, many of the lessons that I have learned are about myself as a person. I am not perfect. I may never be – and I may never want to be...at least so perfect that I lose touch with my humanity. In the same way that I try to be gentle with others, to respect and honor them and their voices, I should not forget myself. I need to recognize and honor my own growth and my own developing voice as well as those same qualities in my mentees. In searching for other people's gifts and talents, in looking for the beauty and celebrating it in others, I have discovered much of the wonderful and special in myself. Truly, that is something to be celebrated.

Mentoring: Some Afterthoughts

"Just where do you think you're going?"...

In exploring and expanding both my own skills and my knowledge of mentoring and the mentoring relationship, I have discovered at first hand just how elusive and complex mentoring and mentorship can be. Most particularly, I have had to come to terms with the two "invariable variables" of mentoring that Daloz (1999) discusses at length: environment/context, and particularity. Mentors need to become aware of and deal with context because this is key to understanding and managing a mentoring relationship. The circumstances, conditions, and contributing forces that comprise the environment in which mentoring occurs affect how we connect, interact with, and learn from each other. As well, each mentoring relationship is unique, just as each individual is one of a kind. This particularity needs to be recognized, acknowledged, nurtured and even celebrated in order for the relationship to be able to grow and prosper. In the end, in order to be able to help, this must be a shared learning relationship rather than one that reflects differentiated power. We need to see and work with the whole person – not just a body, nor simply a brain, or a soul, but the entire being, warts and all.

Mentoring is not a thing. It is not static, cannot always be precisely defined, and cannot be preserved; rather, it appears to be a continuous activity, a

process of learning and living, of adapting and adjusting, of questioning – a process for listening and beginning to shape and refine our life stories.

Investigating my own life and becoming involved in the lives of my mentees, I have noticed common threads – threads that cut across cultural, social, and economic differences and generally disregard gender and age.

My mentoring experiences lead me to believe that all of us have two great yearnings in life. One of these is an overwhelming need to belong. This idea of connection, inclusion, and intimacy is tremendously important to each one of us as we search for a sense of community and participation in our lives. The other desire we all seem to have is our need to make a difference – to matter on some (spiritual) level, to have a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives. As human beings, one of our essential drives is that of trying to understand the significance our lives have in the greater scheme of things.

Mentoring acknowledges and respects these yearnings. Accordingly, the mentoring relationship is a powerful means of helping people become clearer on these two aspects and to help them understand the ways in which their own experience can make sense of both the predictable and the unpredictable in their day-to-day lives.

The reflections this self-study has provoked for me indicate that, at its heart, mentoring is a moral endeavor and struggle, a living theory of values which I strive towards in my daily practice, and the creative expression of who I am and who I am becoming. Looking at the questions that I used to frame the study, I

can see how they foreshadow such a conclusion.

Nothing shapes our lives as much as the questions we ask – or refuse to ask – throughout our lives. Our reason for being, for existing, is not a question that we can answer and then be done with it.

Dragonfly Dreaming (Pencil and ink sketch)
-ksc, 2000

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Appendices

Appendix A

"Zack" is a learner at the Adult Education Center in _____ville, Quebec. This is his story, as he decided to tell it. During the taping, which was done on April 20, 1999, there was no one else in the office with him.

"Zack":   Kathy--uh--My name is "Zack" and Kathy has asked me to talk about self-directed learning and my own experiences with self-directed learning.

Um--I wrote this nice, messy letter right here *(holds it up)* but I think that it would be better expressed in words, and be--would mean more if you could see me telling about my experiences than if I was just reading it onto a tape. So, then, here I am.

Um--I haven't always been a self-directed learner. I guess when I was in high school I don't feel that I was given the chance to be a self-directed learner, and when I--but when I came to Adult Education--um--in September, 1996--3 years ago--I found it a different atmosphere, and--uh--I was given a chance to plan my education.

And--uh--it's been this year especially that I have--I've become involved in what I wanted to learn and what I would learn about. I think that's because I saw my--my...and the end was near, I was gonna get my DES, I was gonna move on, and --uh--my...And maybe it was a bit of spite, too, because people said that I wouldn't--there was a possibility that I wouldn't graduate, and there was a high possibility that I wouldn't graduate, so I guess I kinda wanted to show them...and maybe it was because I was more mature and finally realized that I wanted to move on...and maybe it was because I found myself--I found myself more interested in what I was learning. I don't know why it took place, but it just did, and I slowly, gradually became more self-directed. Before it was *"Here, do this by this time"*. Now it's *"Okay--this is what I'll learn, by this time"* .

For example--uh--we've had--I've found ways to help myself learn and to--um--to by the way I will learn. For example, we had a goal setting sheet that were given--every student was given at the beginning of the year, and--uh--I didn't like the way it was formatted. I didn't like the way that we had--that we would put our goals down, put the date we wanted to do 'em and--uh--I changed it to shorter time periods because I find that I learn better in shorter time periods instead of...

If I give myself a month to learn something, then I wait 'til the 28th 29th of the month to learn it and it doesn't get done. But if I set my goals in weeks or days or even classes, I--uh--I get it done quickly and more--I get it, it's better...I find if I set--I set myself--if I take one project and I take pieces of

the project and say this is the time I'm going to be done, then I find the final outcome of the project is better than when I would rush it...

And I've also discovered and found that taking walks would help me get more focussed if I was falling asleep it would--it was better to get up and take a walk than to fall asleep and drool on my desk. *(smiles and laughs)* And--uh--I found out that I'm an avid conversationalist, and I love conversations. So I found that--uh--I would limit my conversation...I can't stop talking in class, but I would limit conversation. I would --uh--work alone for the first part or the first three-quarters of the class, and after that I would take a break, and I would talk with the other students or I would talk with the teacher, or I just--uh...I found ways to--to--uh-- "shape" the way I would learn, to better better my--betterto better the way I would learn and to better the way I was receiving the information so that I would I would--I've...I've just become more interested in learning, and--um--when I first came to Adult Ed. I--um--wanted my DES but now for some reason, I don't know why, I've all...I'm becoming more interested in CEGEP--maybe university, most likely university--um--I can see myself there now and I think a big part of it is if you can see yourself accomplishing your goals and if you have set those goals for yourself, then when you're finished, it's more--more gratifying than if someone has set your goals for you. And--uh--I think that's a big part of of--uh--I find that I--that's why I'm enjoying education more because I'm setting my goals and when I finish my goals for myself that I have set and it's--it's more self-gratifying and it makes me want to set more goals and to go further in what I've--I'm doing.

So that's basically it. I guess--um--my--my big success will be graduating this year, and I will--I--I can't wait *(big grin while shaking head)*--It's about time. I've slacked off in the past years but--uh--this year I'll be graduated and that'll be it...And I find this year--I don't know where it came from, but--uh--I've ust become more...more self-motivated, more--I want to finish. I guess I can--I see it, myself finishing, I see myself going on in education, and--uh--or life, or anything I plan to do--it doesn't really matter as long as I've--I'm successful...successful... Success is measured in, I guess *(smiles)* "different strokes for different folks". That's pretty much it.

("Zack" looks up--Kathy has walked into the room and is standing behind the camera. She is, obviously, saying something to him, because...)

And thank you for *(big grin)* your attention of and listening to my maybe boring and long speech--or letter.

I guess that's all I should have said--or is there something that I left out? *(Nods--picture fades out.)*

-xxx-

Appendix B

Dear kathy,

Self directed learn.

You have asked me to reflect on, goal setting
What I have learned, I will try and put it on paper
but it is probably best described orrally.

When I first came to Adult Education in September
96 I didn't know what to expect. What I found a
an open oppertunity to get an education. As a Student a
public high school I would go to Six one, hour classes
a day. My Schedule was outlined for me and I was to
what had to be learned and when it had to be learned
by. obviously ~~for me~~ this ~~class~~ was not the type o
learning style suited for me. I also found it hard
to take in a keep information fed to me by ~~me~~
people J found the least bit interesting.

At Adult Ed. my Schedule was planed to meet
my best interest and could be changed if requested.
I also only had two classes a day in the same am
of time as Six classes in high school. This I foun
gave me more time to work on a subject. If I
didn't get it the first class J would work on it
the next time I had that class.

I ~~ha~~ play a key role in planning my goals and
setting a time frame in when they will be met.
in my three years here my overall plan has changed
from obtaining my DES onto moving on to cegep or
possibly university.

I have also discovered that setting smaller goals
in shorter time spans, forces me to meet them. I
am not being told this, I know this for myself

and put it into progress because I was setting my goals nearer to a month for each project I was work on. Now I take peices of the whole project and set a goal to finish them by the end of the week and sometime by the next few days. This helps me see what ne to be done and accomplish it.

I am also more interested in education and the way it is run. Just due to the fact that I play major role in the way & am taking it in. I have design and formated a sheet for my goals. Just because I d like the way the original was put together and real it would not help me the way it was originally formated.

Ive also learnt that ~~there~~ there are little things I can do that will help me to learn better such as taking a five min walk to wake up. Or working alone for the first part of class. because I am a talker. I realize that It is impossible to stop my chatting because I love Conversation. I just limit the amount ~~that I talk~~ of talking I do by sitting alone.

I have done more work this year than my last two years. There is many possible answers for this sudd turn around. maybe I am more mature, maybe it's where I am in my life. I have an answer that I think is the right one. for one thing I can see my large goal being met. I also think that I have developed a learning style that I am pretty pleased with. By giving the chance to direct my-self and have a say on how and how long it will take to learn the information I think I have become a better

Appendix C

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Tuesday, 17 November, 1998

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Boy! Today has been a bad day for a number of reasons--I feel like a real idiot. I'm losing confidence in myself at a rapid rate...not only as a teacher, but as a student. I really am disappointed in my lack of ability in being able to communicate in writing--to say nothing of the fact that most of my confreres seem to take me as a joke. I've just about gotten to the point where I'm going to drop the whole idea of the MEd, because I obviously don't have the smarts or the skills to continue without making an ass out of myself.

I will, however, continue with the action research stuff because I'm already committed and feel that I need to do it, but I think that I'll probably cash the rest of it in: my ego isn't really in shape for being battered quite so much--between teaching and learning I'm taking a real beating here--but I've also gotten some tremendous insights, thanks to sitting down and talking to "Zack" about the progress sheets and the goal setting process.

To begin with, he's not at all sure that the progress sheets we fill out are all that useful to him. As he says, they're "not bad, but I don't really refer to it, except in your class"; that is, he doesn't use it, he says, in French because he already knows where he's going (it's a taught class so he claims that there's no sense in trying to predict anything) and he doesn't need to use it in math because Sheila has all the objectives and a time frame all set out on another sheet of paper.

When asked to make a comment about his goal setting abilities, he stated that *if the period was too long between due dates--even if they were goals that he himself has set--he tended to ignore them because he figured that he always had "plenty of time" to do it in, and then would realize that he didn't, and get mad at himself.* As well, he

commented that *the more complex tasks were easier to put off because of their complexity—that finally they just loomed too large in the future and became all the more frightening and impossible to do.* He admitted that he knew that he should break down any of these tasks into simpler activities, but just never bothered to do so. He also indicated that he rarely studies at night, although he started off with the best of intentions every day/afternoon—but then gets side-tracked the moment he gets home. He seemed a bit surprised when I voiced the opinion that maybe he shouldn't even BOTHER taking home his school bag—that maybe he shouldn't bother studying or even pretending to at night. His suggestion was that maybe he could set aside one evening only a week to get some school work done, but we let it go there and went on to talk about more productive stuff. I then asked if a daily sheet might be helpful, because I know that he's used to working with this type of thing in Sheila's class, and he agreed that it might just work...BUT he offered a couple of suggestions in terms of redesigning the sheet: he requested that he have a space for his proposed daily goal inserted and another which verified whether that goal had been met or not. (See enclosed.) He says he'll give that a try for a week or so to see if it's helpful, monitoring his successes (or non-successes?) himself. I think that he's learning a STRATEGY! Self-directed learning is on its way (well, at least it's a possibility).

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Monday, 11 January, 1999

****

I've just finished working up the proposal for that workshop/presentation that we're hoping to give on our mentoring system. Since it's due the 15th, I've spent a fair amount of energy the last couple of evenings putting it together, and have just finished putting the final touches on it so that we can get it out tomorrow. At the same time, I've been working on that symposium submission, and I think that I've finally gotten it all together --on BOTH.

In the meantime, life goes on and learners continue to amaze me with the amount they have grown personally. "Zack", for example, has always been outgoing and very helpful and supportive with other students--perhaps a little too much so, with the upshot being that his own work suffered because everyone else's work was much more interesting. Well, "Zack" has gotten a fire lit underneath him now! He can just about taste that diploma, and he's taking all the necessary steps to ensure that he gets it this May. Although he still needs to finish half of his level V English, all of his level V French, and some 12 optional credits as well, he has set down a plan for success: to finish the rather tedious 1st and 2nd assignments in ENG 5062-3 as quickly as possible so that he can get to work on his (more exciting) research paper (he has specific dates and everything!), but he has consulted with me and his math teacher as well in order to determine the best course of action for his remaining optional credits--right down to which course he will begin once he's finished that 1st ENG assignment and when he predict each other course will be finished. I am impressed, indeed--but I'm most impressed by the fact that all this has been his idea, and he has demonstrated a real determination to get his work done. He

even forgot to go to Break this morning because he was so absorbed in his work! As well, he's informed me that he's not only taking bits and pieces home to work on, but that he's trying to get more rest (as in regular sleep) and eat better because he knows that he works better when he's rested and has a full stomach. He was absolutely THRILLED when Margaret and Elena both asked him if they could have a copy of the daily goal sheet that he had transformed /recreated to fit his personal needs. (They were suitably impressed because it seems to work—not only for him but for the others that they've tried it with!) Our mentoring meeting—outside of class time—lasted well beyond lunch and into the afterschool hours, for roughly 2 hours of discussing "plans". I really like this mentoring stuff, but it sure eats into my free time! HOWEVER, if a couple of hours here and there can make a difference in the way in which these people see themselves and helps them to be able to make more informed and decisive choices/goals, then I suppose I shouldn't complain. Actually, I'm pretty sure that plenty of teachers took all sorts of extra time working with me, so I guess it's "payback" time.

Appendix D

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transcript

"Holly Maple" is a student at the Adult Education Center in _____ville, Quebec. The following is a transcript of the audio tape that she made of her personal positive affirmations.

SFX: *...fade in waves and music ("Inner Sea" composed, arranged, and performed by David Bradstreet)*

Holly: These are positive affirmations:

I love myself.

I am intelligent and creative.

I have interesting and valuable opinions.

I speak up for myself.

I am well liked and respected by everyone.

I am confident and self-assured.

I look forward to meeting life's new challenges.

I am surrounded by love and harmony.

I have a meaningful purpose on this earth.

People listen to what I have to say.

I can easily make myself heard and understood.

I like myself and love the person that I am.

I do not fear anything.

God loves me and I adore myself.

I love myself more every day.

I am kind and gentle with myself.

SFX: *...fade out music*

-xxx-

Appendix E

transcript

"Misha Foster" attends classes as a full-time student at the Adult Education Center in _____ville, Quebec. The following is a transcript of the audiotape she made in October, 1999 in which she talks about her dream.

Um – hi. My name is – uh – Misha Foster, and – um – I have a dream. I can see it so clearly right now. Um – I dream of one day living on this big farm – like 2,000 acres and having all these tons of animals like cows, giraffes – everything. Anything I can get. And – um – just not kill them, nothing. They just sit there and get fat. And – um – they don't have to worry about anybody hurting them or anything. Even deer – everything is going to be there, and – um – the farm is going to be so big so that they'll never even see the gate so it's like they won't be in prison or anything.

And – um – I really want this dream so bad, and well, 2000 acres just does cost a lot so – um – I'm keeping in mind that I need to make a lot of money, like at least a million to buy this, so I am going to make it all the way. I know inside that for sure I'm going to get that.

I – so far I don't exactly know how. I know I'm going – uh – to get my diploma, then I'm going to college, then I'm going to university. I'm going to go all the way and I'm going to get – learn as much as possible, get as far as I can, get as much money as I can so I can have my farm and adopt a lot of kids that are on the streets or don't have families or whatever, and I just want to help the world out as much as possible.

And – um – although like money doesn't mean a lot to me, like to buy fancy cars or whatever, but I just want as much money as possible so I can help other people and help other animals and to make this world a better place – and I think that this is what will make me happy in my life…and nothing's going to stop me to get it. And – um – I am just so motivated ever since I saw this dream. I just go as fast as I can, do as much as I can, and – um – I dunno I just – I know that if anybody can change the world, it's me.

And I believe that I'm going to do it. I might not change the whole world, but I know I'm going to change as much as I can, and – um – go as far as I can, learn as much as I can. If – uh – any human can get money, become a millionaire, change the world, it's me.

And I believe that anybody can do this. All they need to do is get a dream and for sure you can make it. Anybody can do anything they want to do, and – uh – I know nobody can stop you…and nobody's going to stop me.

Thank you. 'Bye.

-xxx-

Appendix F

Things I've learned
about myself.

- I love to dress up

  - wearing different clothing
    and playing a role

  (maybe I do this for a change
        of self)

- I am very gullible. my sister
  has different ways of
          pursuading me to do
  things

- I love being alone

- I am dependant

Sister is like a director,
and I'm the character.

Old memories

- getting splinters in feet
- taking bath in sink, feeling frozen when door opens

  - Can't judge fact by fiction,
  - don't know
  - maybe by pictures

Barone, T. & Eisner, E. (1997). Arts - Based educate Research. In R.M. Jaeger (Ed) Complementary methods for Research Education. (pp. 73-115). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association

Mitchell, C. & Weber, S. (1999). Reinventing Ourselves as teachers: Beyond nostalgia London: Falmer Press.

A self-study really sucks. It's the most annoying research I've ever had to do. I am so bored with myself. I'm finding out things about my myself that I never wanted to know. I hate it. I have all the words I need, but I can't start. I hate people who "try" to be nice to me, when I know they don't want to. I am the type of person who doesn't care about other peoples affaires. I hate school, because I am lazy and tired. I have to get the done because I'm tired of having things on my back. Doing a self study is hard work. I'm not quite sure what I want to prove exactly. I know the most important at that's but I am doing, to end up finding out that I am a totaly different person then I thought I was, also that would be quite bad. The most difficult thing I have to do is percive myself if I am a shy & quiet person. why? I have no idea and that is the papers beli when I am finised, I will be able to realice more about m,

Things I knew about myself before I started this recherch

- shy
- quiet
- dependant
- opinionated
- I take things to heart
- I have an attitude
- I am a baby
- Lazy
- honest

Things I am starting to learn about myself..

- my sister has more of an impact on the things I do. (than I thought)
- I love to pretend
- I am very guilible
- playing roles and dressing to the image I feel like doing
- I love to work alone
- I am usually organized

When I first decided to do this self study I thought it would be nice and easy. How hard could it possible be to write about yourself? Now I know, it's very hard to study yourself. I want to be able to explain myself and how I was always different to those other girls around me. Throughout my schooling (graceschool) I always were pants and sweaters. It was just weird for me to dressup. I explain it like this, wearing a dress a skirt to me is, only for a special occasion a something.

People I know who always wear dresses a skirts want to show something, like they have someone to impress. Maybe I never wear those kinds of clothing because I feel much more comfortable wearing jeans a maybe it's because my parents never had the time to make me look pretty. Sometimes I wish they would have made me wear pretty clothes, so when I would wear them now, I wouldn't feel so out of place. It's not only clothing that made me different from other girls, it was also our playing times. Other girls always had barbies and girly stuff. I had trucks and my business work. I often felt like I didn't fit in well enough, because I felt so different when I was in elementary school.

Appendix G

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

"Dancing in Front of the Blue Screen:
The Everyday Struggles and Celebrations of Mentoring"

RESEARCH ON MENTORING TO BE CONDUCTED BY KATHARINE CHILDS, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

I have been given an oral presentation about the research project on mentoring to be conducted by Katharine Childs.

By signing the form below, I understand that I agree to become a participant in Katharine Childs' research on mentoring, and freely give her my permission to draw upon our mentoring sessions for material for that research. As well, I am aware that the results of this research may be published.

I also understand that Katharine will be using some or all of the following as data for this research; accordingly, I have marked (with an X) those categories that contain material I give her permission to use and include in her work:

_____ journal and/or any written work submitted by me;

_____ drawings, mind maps, and/or other visual and sound texts produced by me;

_____ personal photographs;

_____ any photographs of me taken during sessions or in classes.

Furthermore, it is my understanding that, throughout the research and in the study, I will be identified solely by the pseudonym that I have chosen, and that any identifying factors pertaining to me, my situation, and any of the material that I submit will be changed in such a way that maximum confidentiality and anonymity may be ensured.

I understand that I am welcome to examine any and all of my own data at any time and that any section of the study that pertains to me personally will be made available for me to read and to discuss with Katharine prior to its release and publication. Additionally, I understand that the entire study will be made available to me when it is completed.

As well, I have been informed that I may withdraw from the study at any time and that I may take any of the data that I have submitted with me without any negative consequences.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

DATE: _____

NAME (please print): _____

SIGNATURE: _____

WITNESS SIGNATURE: _____

Written copy of what will be communicated to subjects and/or relevant third parties in an oral form to inform them about the research to be undertaken:

In an attempt to improve my practice as a mentor, I have constantly asked myself how I could help my mentees to grow academically and personally so that they could shape and live their lives purposefully. As part of my on-going reflection into my practice (Schön, 1983) I have wondered what I could change about what I am doing in order to help me become a better, more effective mentor and offer better services to the people in my care.

Accordingly, I have decided to engage in a formal inquiry into my practice as a mentor working with adults enrolled in a full-time academic program of studies in an adult education center. I will present this account framed as a self-study (Hamilton, 1998; Whitehead, 1993, 2000; Mitchell and Weber, 1999) and a case study of mentoring (Yin, 1994; Strike & Soltic, 1985). As such, I will be examining the work that I do with those people who have been assigned to me as mentees. This may involve my relating selected moments and circumstances that are part of my mentees' and my work together as being representative of certain situations that have encountered throughout my practice as a mentor.

Because you are one of my mentees, it is possible that I may wish to use some of our sessions as material for this research. The results of this research may be published.

As a participant in my study, I will do my utmost to ensure that there is maximum confidentiality surrounding your part in our work together. For example, you will be identified solely by a pseudonym that you alone will choose, and which

will be known only by you and me. Additionally, any identifying factors pertaining to you, your situation, and any of the material submitted by you, will be changed in such a way that confidentiality and anonymity may be ensured.

You will be welcome to examine and discuss with me any and all of the data and material in the study that pertains to you personally, prior to its release and publication. In fact, I will make the entire study available to you when it is completed, should you so desire.

As well, you may withdraw from this study and take any of the data which you have submitted with you at any time without negative consequences.

Should you agree to participate in the study, I would ask you to please complete and sign the attached consent form. If you require additional information, or have any questions, please feel free to contact me at any time -- in school or outside of the school environment. I will make my home telephone number and e-mail address available to you for this purpose.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.
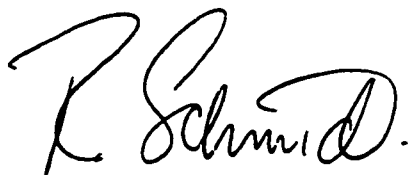
Katharine Childs
Home telephone: (514) 482-8855   E-mail: kathy_childs@email.com

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
LB - 579
SIR GEORGE WILLIAMS CAMPUS

TO: **Ms. Katherine Childs**

FROM: **Dr. Richard Schmid, Chair**

DATE: **April 19, 2001**

RE: **Your Research Proposal: "Dancing in Front of the Blue Screen:**
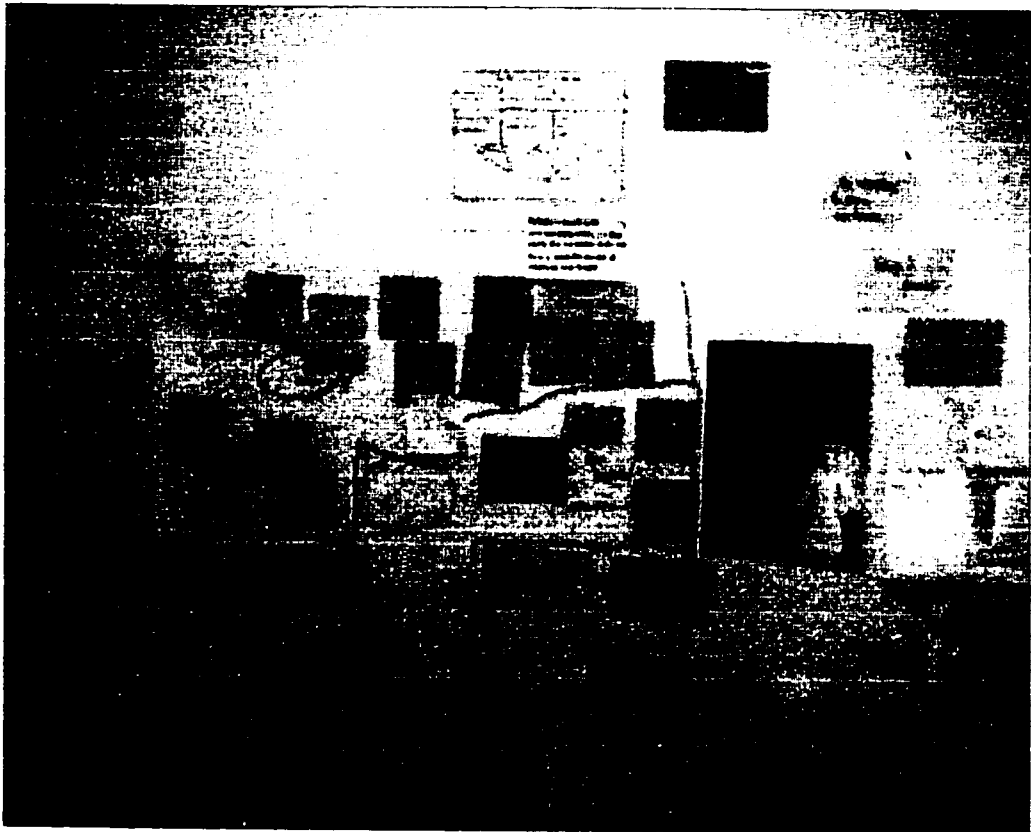   **The Everyday Struggles and Celebrations of Mentoring"**

This note is to inform you that your research proposal has successfully passed
the scrutiny of the Department's Ethics Committee and has been accepted.

We take this opportunity to wish you every success with this project.

R. Schmid

Appendix H

-ksc
20 July, 2001

The Thesis Wall