

**Transformative Tensions in the Third Age:  
Mature Students and the Changing Face of Teacher Education**

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## **Abstract**

### **Transformative Tensions in the Third Age:**

#### **Mature Students and the Changing Face of Teacher Education**

Cindy Walker

The purpose of this study is to investigate the lived experiences of four mature students, Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte and myself (all over 45 years of age) and our return to learning to pursue a professional teaching career. Given the influx of mature learners at the postsecondary level, sometimes referred to as 'third age' students, more attention is needed on the experiences of this population, particularly in fields of study like teacher education, which has historically targeted younger students. From our stories of returning to learning, three themes emerged that defined our experiences: relationships, values and challenges. Based on these themes, the complexity of being marginalized due to age, yet privileged due to life experience, came to the forefront. As mature learners, we experienced transformative tensions that suggest shifts in postsecondary education are warranted in terms of life-long learning and the capacity of institutions to provide the kinds of personal and professional support needed for mature student success. With particular attention to holistic education, our stories highlight respect, empathy and compassion for others, from which core concepts of duality, ambiguity, dialectic, power dynamics and living curriculum emerged as outcomes of this study. Examining the lived experiences of mature learners in higher education allows rich transformative experiences and innovative learning perspectives to develop concerning the understanding of self, education, and classroom communities, and by extension, creation and transformation of a learning society and culture.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this project to my parents, my husband and sons, and Anita.

For you I will remember to trust.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte, who generously gave their hearts, time, commitment and laughter to this research. I would like to thank my family and friends, especially Seonjeong, for their generous support, love, and encouragement. To my husband Brent, who continued to remind me to write from my heart, you are my strength. I would like to express my wholehearted appreciation to my supervisor, Anita Sinner, your love and support has changed my life and who will continue to be an example of an instructor who sees the student and teaches for transformation. Thank you for believing in my significance as a person, as well as my capacity as a “mature” student. Also, a thank you to my committee for their support and patience, who believed in my process: Linda Szabad-Smith and Boyd White.

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## Chapter 1

**I am older, I should know; but I'm older, so I don't know**

We shall not cease from exploration

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.

-T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*

The poetic lines of T. S. Eliot speak to the “place,” or perspective from which I write this thesis. Elliot’s worldview resonates with me, describing for me how I have come to see as a mature adult student who has returned to university to become an art educator. Life experience enables a new stance for renewal and transformation. Returning to university, I see anew through a lens of lived experiences. I explore and learn from a new “place” that only age can offer. In response, I am interested in the study of other mature learners’ experiences in returning to learning. I am curious as to how their experience might shape their process, understanding, and identity in teacher education. In this study I am joined by Rob, Rosemary and Charlotte, and our stories collectively form my research study.

In looking back at my life as a starting point, I recognize some major contributions that influence my present passions, perspectives, and preferences of study and research. At a young age, I was introduced to the art of music. I had six years of piano lessons, I sang in church and school choirs, and played guitar. I learned to “hear the story” in music, and understand its aesthetic and harmonious language. I experienced the value of imagination and nuance of musical composition and voice, a way of being sustained across my lifetime.

In my Christian religious upbringing, biblical stories were intrinsic to



understanding and practice. Narrative, as well as visual imagery, symbolism, myth, and metaphor, were vital forms of learning. These artistic means of knowledge transfer and meaning-making extended learning to daily life, creating a rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) sense of holistic being and becoming. This form of learning simultaneously spoke to my rational mind of the factual and historic, yet nurtured a deep appreciation for meaning, understanding, and initiative knowing. It was through this Christian practice that I realized imagination and intuition often preceded a conceptual conscious knowing, and this became my pattern of learning throughout my life. I was privileged with the opportunity to experience the enduring energies of art through my faith tradition. I realized the potential of art to speak to the subconscious wherein all things become sacredly connected. These encounters with stories, myth, and symbols from a Christian perspective, reaching my mind and heart as an embodied learning and knowing, where “past and present are constant companions” (Horsdal, 2014, p. 63). The language of art resounded an expanded connection for a deep understanding of self, others, and so the world, providing a holistic, transformative approach to learning.

Being a wife, fulltime homemaker, and mother of three sons, family and relationship are central in my life. Art making, specifically drawing and painting, as well as poetry and writing, has been a favorite form of personal expression, discovery, and exploration that waited for my participation. Unfortunately, time did not allow for many creative ventures as a young mother, but I relished the rare opportunities when I was captivated by the unpredictable creative direction of the process, and the emergence of surprising outcomes. The adventurous process seemed to always lead to revelations for further expansion in understanding self and life.

In part, my current arts research is the manifestation of my visual and literary arts interests across a lifetime, which culminate in this thesis as a form of scholarly expression. I savor the artful processes of transformation, as the familiar becomes, in the words of London (2003), “barely familiar” (a reference to the Russian Surrealists,

something that has conceptually guided education in many realms) (p. 63). Through art and in art making, I encountered a provisional wealth of new perspectives. With thankfulness, these opportunities now teach me another language wherein I experience a transformation in seeing, being and becoming. Art magnifies the value and beauty of the “in-between” where movements of inquiry, exploration, reflection, risk, and expression allow the discovery of “transversal connections,” a Deleuzian construction of possibility, understanding, and learning (O’Sullivan, 2006; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

In returning to university, I was given an opportunity to further foster life-long interests, for a creation of, and fulfillment of a life-long dream: visual and literary art that meaningfully speaks to our lives. And so my journey unfolds in my *late-in-life* undergraduate studies, which formally introduced me to English and American Literature, in a process of close reading, and then, the genre of creative nonfiction (CNF). The power of literary art forms was further realized as I began to keep a reflective journal, and I was endeared to living creatively, efficacious to intrigue, to draw, and to speak in diverse ways and on multiple levels. I treasured the essence of CNF, a humble patience for understanding ways of expressing self in the academy through a literary art form that enlivened me with holistic movements for learning and a calling forth of a deep knowing for an “interpretation of selves and existence” (Horsdal, 2014, p 57). The further study of visual and literary creative art forms contributed to a greater awareness of the rich offering in story, its value for transmitting wisdom and knowledge, for being and for the evolution of self (Sullivan, 2005; Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, Leggo, & Sinner, 2015; Sinner, Sameshima & Walker, 2015). In “telling” our stories, knowledge “comes to life,” “bringing the humanity of learning to the heart of conversation” (Sinner et al, 2015, p. 167), pronouncing the precious value of and meaning of living life. Through life writing, the unique and universal meanings found in our lived experiences become articulated and resurrected with an empathetic regard for new ways, or simply, new possibilities of continued development, connections, and change (Sullivan, 2005;

Ayers, 1989). In and through the universal language of story, we begin to “discover [more of] our own story,” beckoning us “to live true to its wisdom” (Silf, 2003, p. 7).

This value for literary expression and art making continued to shape my life perspective, eventually influencing my choice to pursue art education at the undergraduate and graduate level, as well as influencing my current research topic, design and methodology. As a mature older adult, I appreciate the privilege of learning in new ways never before realized. As an older student, I have been given the opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream involving an artful articulation of meaning within human experience through story. To foreground my research, I begin this thesis with my storied experience of returning to university at 50 years of age. My personal background and interests, and so, “personal history,” includes “ethics and political stances” as the experiential basis from which I “situate [myself] as inquirer” and “inform” my study (Creswell, 2013, p. 51).

### **Cindy’s Story:**

I was thankful for being a stay-at-home mom for twenty-five years. With my children now out of the house, at least most of the time, I felt an inner hunger to grow, to learn new skills, and to contribute to others in new ways. I decided to go back to school where I would be exposed to and learn about a larger world, and I convinced my husband to return to school with me. This was not an easy change for us, or our sons. When they visited or returned for any extended time, our family routines conjured me to return to the rhythms of my mothering role, despite the fact I had assignments and projects to do. And at times, I felt like a foreign being, in this new life of being a student. Even among my long-time friends, going back to school at my age seemed wonderful, but a crazy venture.

For me, undertaking a degree was the realization of a long-held dream, but upon returning to university, I encountered a new world. My sheltered, religious

background and the female role models that background provided prepare me for the world outside the home, or one of independence.

Now we had moved to an apartment to attend university in Montreal, sold our car, and took a bus or the metro to school—a far cry from small rural towns where we had spent most of our years. Basic skills needed to be learned, such as how to use technology, to speak up and ask questions in class, not a skill that was reinforced when I was last in school. Despite all this, my biggest challenge was having been a traditional mother and wife. My family had been my foremost priority, and now my priority became me, for the first time. And I wondered: Who would take care of me?

In my first year I devoted much more time to reading and assignments than was seemingly expected in my courses, in part because I was interested, fascinated, and cherished that which was new and enlightening. It was a privileged space for me and I was driven by perfectionism. Despite my good grades, I often cried in my first year, believing I could not write, have any opinion, nor form one, let alone complete an assignment with sufficient quality.

Feeling inadequate and ill-equipped, in my first year I only registered for classes that my husband was in. Our togetherness was the bridge I needed to find my way. He was articulate, quick minded, and had been writing, organizing, and reading all through his career. To be on my own was truly frightening. I felt like such an anomaly. Yet I knew I was beginning to think differently.

I was in a liminal space wherein my passion for meaning had not ended, but needed expanding. I had a desire to grow and learn and find my place in society, and therein contribute in new ways. To return to what I left was unthinkable. But I often wondered: Was I capable of being a successful student, and if so, to actually teach? Did I, or would I, offer anything? Maybe I was too old?

After two years of general courses, I discovered I could enter Art Education and was truly welcomed “home,” for it had been a childhood dream to become an art teacher. This program offered me hope that has since become reality.

Through art education my understanding of myself and the world, and possibilities for the future, have been clarified and enlarged in a meaningful way.

But I also quickly realized the challenges that I would face. Being from another generation than my fellow students was a privilege, yet in other ways I was disadvantaged. The younger generation had already developed training, and my years of life experience often seemed useless in my new endeavor and identity. Often I was flooded with a feeling that I could not catch up, that I was in an environment where younger people knew more than I did, were quicker, and had better minds and memory.

I wanted to learn, and knew the satisfaction of doing my best, and I attached my worth and capability to my grades. I felt I required much more time to read and do assignments than the time given, and I struggled with the belief that being older, I should do well, if not better, than younger students. I battled back and forth between feeling that I had so much I wanted to say, seeing far beyond what my young peers understood about life, while other times feeling I had nothing to offer. I wondered if others felt that way about me too. I fluctuated between two conflicting expectations: I am older, I should know; but I’m older, so I don’t know.

Who could understand this unique combination of ironic roles and identities? Being outside the social norm because of my age, I felt invisible, yet I felt visible as a mom figure to some of my classmates, a reminder that I continued to wrestle with my conflicting roles at home and at school. I also encountered a private struggle. I experienced resentment and misunderstanding at times. I had day-to-day responsibilities that younger students did not have to be concerned with because I was sandwiched between my private and public worlds, at times

caring for my aging mother and caring for my grown sons. Most of my peers were concerned about getting out of school and starting life. They were fearless with fresh ideas, and had more self-esteem. I struggle with fear and lack of confidence, my old baggage. My divided heart made me slower. Perfectionism drove me to focus on outcomes.

During this time, process fed my soul with meaning and on the difficult days, I reminded myself that education was also a means of personal fulfillment. Learning was an amazing joy, enlarging my world, my mind, and my consciousness. But would anyone really want to hire me?

I had to keep walking, trusting, and working. Hard.

I have been humbled and surprised by my own potential and the possibilities of learning. I have learned over the last years that my work reflects a distinct quality, because I do care deeply about learning and contributing to a new world of my making in art education, and I do continue to learn from the world I have had. As a mature woman, I am sometimes blinded by society's focus on youth, but I am determined to defy stereotypes. This experience of returning to learning has challenged me to interrogate what I had believed, what I do believe, and what I hoped for, or more simply, what I had learned, accepted and rejected in the course of coming to know.

### **From My Story to Our Story: A Rationale for this Study:**

Withnall (2010) calls for attention to the implications of the global aging population, wherein adults are now living longer, healthier lifespans. Aging "baby boomers" have "plenty of energy for and creativity in living" (Findsen, 2005, pp. 12-13) a longer life that is considerably free of the many early and later life limitations. This new phenomenon is being formally called "the third age," or the adult period of life when family rearing responsibilities are generally over, and the final stages of dependency

prior to death are at a distance (Findsen, p. 13). Ennals and Salomon (2011) report that third-agers have an “underestimated” (p. 11) advantage because a shift in demographics also supports a decreasing young work force, further necessitating an educational re-focus on older mature adults and their needs (see also Ackerman, 2014).

The perspective of older mature adults is also changing, in contrast to previous generations (Ennals & Salomon, 2011). A longer “in-between” time of autonomy allows for the consideration of new possibilities to be actualized; new choices become viable for continued lifelong learning and living as an integrated state of mind.

Herein, a call for a new perspective on lifelong learning and the “educational influences on a person over their entire life span” is in order (Ackerman, 2014, p. 21). Less defined expectations for older adults accompany the new demographic landscape and gives rise to greater creative potentials in education, and in my case art education, toward these issues of identity development (Withnall, 2010; Sinner, et al., 2015). As mature learners in third-age transition are returning to post-secondary learning institutions, this ‘new’ identity development must be recognized in our classrooms, supported in our curriculum, and integrated into program development in ways that contribute to pertinent personal and collective transformation.

In collaboration with three mature Concordia University students, my research investigates and advocates for the older adult student experience of entering the “third age” of learning in life, and the forging of new career and identity as teachers. Historically, Concordia University evolved from the adult education lineage, making the university an ideal site to investigate my study (<http://archives.concordia.ca/sgw>). Challenging the traditional patterns of aging, today’s mature adult students, as generative members of society, bring experience to the forefront of learning (Formosa, 2010; Findsen, 2005; Withnall, 2010). As full-fledged career-seeking motivated learners planning to become teachers, mature learners demonstrate a “readiness for change” and “deeper well” of “greater life experience” (Taylor, 2008, p. 12). The experience of

being marginalized due to age, yet privileged due to life experience then presents a critical andragogic tension that can inform post-secondary education with alternate perspectives, and bring insight to the development of new learning strategies that promote greater respect, empathy and compassion for others, or simply, a greater regard for the humanity in learning.

The term “andragogy,” or the science or art of teaching adults, is used in connection with adult education, in contrast to “pedagogy,” the science or art of teaching children (Selman, Selman, Cooke, & Dampier, 1998, p. 19). Though developmentally, adult education has been distinct from university educational programs of preparation, today’s “demographic shift” of a growing aging population requires new perspectives in education (Akerman, 2014, p. 22; Lakin, 2009). Relatedly, Brookfield (2013, 2005, 1987), Withnall and Percy (1994), Withnall (2010), Merriam (2001, 2004), and Johnston (2011), refer to ethical action in the classroom, contributing toward an empathetic model of respect toward human diversity. Foundationally, adult education research (Brookfield, 2013, 2005, 1987; Wise and Glowacki-Dudka, 2004; Lakin, 2009; Laslett, 1989) aids a creation of expanded education processes that embrace a holistic and inclusive democratic educational practice for the empowerment of all learners in a changing world that includes the mature adult learner. The mature student’s value of process and personal meaning is integral to one’s value and construction of knowledge. This claim is evident in, and integral to, my motivation for thesis research.

As the third age allows for mature adults pursuing second and third careers to return to post-secondary education programs, university curriculum and delivery becomes a pertinent and crucial concern. (Formosa, 2010; Laslett, 1989). An examination of the mature adult’s experience in higher education is essential to facilitate the changing student profile. The influx of mature adult learners into education, a field of study that has historically targeted younger student populations, requires a shift in assumptions regarding lifelong learning and the capacity of post-secondary institutions



to provide support. This is particularly the case for mature adults wishing to initiate new career paths in teacher education. The incorporation of personal experiences in higher education offer insights to the rich transformative experiences and innovative learning underway concerning the self, education, and classroom community, and by extension, a learning society and culture.

The purpose of my study is to investigate the lived experiences of mature students (over 45 years of age) returning to learning at the post-secondary level to pursue professional careers in teacher education. I explored the experience of three mature adult students: 1) Rob, who manages of an audio-visual company, a husband and father, and attends full-time university studies with a goal of obtaining a degree in teacher education; 2) Rosemary, a working wife and mother, who attended part-time university studies as a Painting and Drawing major, eventually adding a minor in Art Education to become an art teacher in Community; 3) Charlotte, a single mom, who attended full-time university studies while also working full-time. Her goal was to obtain public school teacher certification, only to eventually discover Community Art Education was more suited to her philosophy of learning and teaching.

My research, guided by grounded theory (Creswell, 2013), is “grounded” in the experience of my fellow contributors through the interactive process of data collection and ongoing analysis. It is informed by hermeneutics, in terms of how I interpret their stories, that is, the text as data, and derive meaning in this study through ongoing “reflexivity” (Creswell, 2013, p 300) that takes into account my “biases, values and experiences” (p. 216)

Being situated in art education further provides an ideal staging for my study as a form of arts research. From interviews, I created storied spaces through the art of life writing, generating a great depth of understanding about the mature adult’s personal, subjective, and diverse experiences of returning to education, as well as the intellectual transformation and the effect on teaching practice. Questions guiding my study

included: *Why are mature students returning to learning? What do they desire, find lacking, and appreciate in their learning experiences? How do mature students engage in the curriculum as teachers and learners? What delivery models better equip mature learners in teacher education? What do mature learners bring to teacher education that contributes to the overall academic experience?*

The stories of mature learners function as sites of “living pedagogy,” (Aoki, 2003; Chambers et al, 2012) or a pedagogy that is presently alive, active and evolving. Through a “living” pedagogy, empathy and care are fostered, stereotypes challenged, and a civil society beyond theory is cultivated through socially informed reflection and compassion (Aoki, 2003, 2005; Freire, 1972; Chambers et al, 2012; Noddings, 2005, 2012; Herron, 2009).

I use the data collection technique of interviews, and the inductive process of life writing, enlightening “expand[ed] understanding” (MacKerracher & Hasebe-Ludt, 2014, p. 126) of the mature learners’ “wayfinding” (Chambers et al, 2012, p. xxi) experience through story. Rendering research in the form of life writing, which incorporates the tenets of creative nonfiction, provides an “opportunity to reflect on lived experience through the creative composition of artful narratives” (MacKerracher & Hasebe-Ludt, p. 126), organically weaving an empathetic view at the heart of story, an essence I believe is not achievable in traditional research methods and representation. The sphere of life writing involves a collaboratively working together toward a kind of co-researcher relationship. Following the “same path,” a collaborative process creates a “potential space between teller and listener” where a “capability for mental time travelling and personal repertoire of activated experiences and emotions” becomes actualized (Horsdal, 2014, p. 57). Herein, “articulated openings about teaching and learning” are more readily accessed and interrogated (Sinner et al, 2015, p. 170).

Through this study, I will ruminate on aspects of the “vague but somewhat settled set of judgments” regarding mature learners, as well as university education (Barone &

Eisner, 2012, p. 154). Through the arts practice of life writing, I will bring forward an emotional response, for an “understanding and feeling” for what it is to be a third ager entering art education to become a teacher (Barone & Eisner, p. 154) and to incur a greater awareness of, and deep reflection on, this new phenomenon. In “problemizing the customary,” I raise needed questions regarding our present educational orientation and learning designs (Barone & Eisner, p. 154). The unique attributes of art offer “illumination and evocation,” and so provoke new sites of learning and insights of the “new” older student, for a “new” reality in higher education (Barone & Eisner, pp. 154-155).

McKerracher and Hasebe-Ludt (2014) suggest that such storytelling methods are a form of knowledge transmission in which dominant ideologies are challenged, multiple meanings summoned, and “significant socio-cultural and historical knowledges” evoked (p. 126). A common humanity is realized “beyond the surface of a text” for a “broader commentary” (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2010; Riessman, 2008, p. 13). At the same time, diverse complexities and conflicting stories call attention to varied meanings and interpretations. A “close reading,” or the attending to the “ambiguity, irony, paradox, and tone” (as cited in Riessman, 2008, p. 11) offers valuable understanding of the mature learner’s regard for meaning, value, and purpose of learning and teaching. After many years of living, then a return to the university classroom, the older adult’s depth of insight is a worthwhile cultivation in the field of art education.

## Chapter 2

### Emergent Inquiry for Understanding: Methodology

I chose a qualitative research approach for my study of the experience of old adult learners who have returned to education to become teachers. Defined by Creswell (2013), qualitative research is “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world” (p. 43). Through qualitative research practices, I advocate greater interest, awareness, and understanding of the personal and social human complexities and needs of the third-age university student who returns to postsecondary institutions to start a new career in teaching. Salada (2011) refers to qualitative research as a “naturalistic inquiry” (p. 29), and so “the study of natural social life” (p. 3). The variety of approaches and investigative methods allow for an “eclectic, heuristic, and holistic” process for a gain of understanding regarding “what is going on” (p. 29) in lives of the older adult students who return to university, in this case, to become teachers. Requiring a thorough investigation and documentation, qualitative research includes the development of “empathetic understanding and personal creativity” within process and outcome (p. 29). Through a mix of “interpretive/theoretical frameworks” (Creswell, 2013, p. 44) of qualitative research, I provide overarching processes and procedures for studying the experience of older adult students that are “inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing of data” (p. 22), thus an organic unfolding of findings. My role as researcher, or “human instrument” is then acknowledged as valuable within the research (p. 23). It should as be noted that authenticity is of vital importance, thus influencing my choice of research design, and the methodology and methods.

Using a qualitative case study I explored the context of the mature learners experience for the conceptual and pragmatic understandings of a mature adult’s

experience in university. This inclusion of multiple perspectives offers “complex detailed understanding” (p. 48), for the recognition of “connections between the individual[s] and their social context...allow[ing] us to identify social issues and determine the questions that need to be asked in order to understand those issues” (Van Den Hoonaard, 2012, p. 34).

My qualitative research applies the case study approach, informed by grounded theory (GT), a methodology wherein I “analyze qualitative data in order to understand human processes and construct theory” (Salada, 2011, p. 6), rather than researching to prove a predetermined theory. With this foundation, I draw on a host of interpretive and arts methods, such as life writing. Combining methodologies aligns with my theoretical position, creating “synergistic practices” that foster a “holistic view” of data and “serve as a point of departure for dialogue” (Leavy, 2009, p. 228). This blended approach enables greater understanding of the diverse personal and subjective experiences of the mature learner in education and their process of transformation.

Adopting arts-based approach of life writing to express Rob, Rosemary and Charlotte’s university experience generated personal, intimate voices that contribute to a greater understanding of each of their experiences of university. By interacting with the participant’s experience through life writing, a “real world and holistic perspective” contributes to our knowledge and understanding of the older student’s academic journey to become teacher (Yin, 2014, p. 4).

In the following, I offer a discussion of these specific chosen methodologies, the ideas that defined my approach to research, followed by the techniques used to collect my data. I conclude with a discussion of my analysis, and the procedures that guided the interpretation of my collected data.

## **Case Study**

Using the qualitative approach of case study research, I conducted a single case

study. Yin (2014) suggests that “the case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena” (p. 1). Creswell (2013) confirms that qualitative case studies can “develop an in-depth understanding of a single case,” (p. 97) while exploring “an issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration” (p. 97). By engaging with my participants’ stories of experience, I focus on a case and “retain a real world and holistic perspective” (Yin, 2014, p. 4) as I record their experiences as a returning older adult student.

Defined by Creswell (2013), a single case study is a “current, real-life” analysis (p. 100) “within a bounded system, bounded by time and place” (2013, p. 98) for “explor[ing] an issue, using the case as a specific illustration” (2013, p. 97) in order to “develop an in-depth understanding” (2013, p. 100). For my research, my bounded system was the art education department undergraduate program, and my data collection took place between March 2014 and continued through to August 2014. With this approach, I found that a single case study provided for a selection of a small number of participants, and allowed for rich interpretative potential and understanding. This was the best design for offering methods that would deepen my analysis.

I considered the various possibilities of case study available, and formed a “purposeful sampling,” (Creswell, 2013, p. 100) to satisfy my specific research interest and investigation. Referencing a grounded theory approach, my “theoretical sampling,” (p. 86) allowed for a “sample of individuals” (p. 290) that would contribute, over time, to an emergence of “similar categories” (p. 29) for generating an understanding regarding the experience of the mature adult student in a university context. The theoretical sampling for a single case provided for the intrinsic and instrumental intentions of my research. My case study involved a married man with children, a single mother, and a married woman with children. Academic variance was also considered as one participant is a current undergraduate in an Early Childhood and Elementary Education program and the other two contributors recently finished their undergraduate studies in

## Art Education.

My participants, Rob, Charlotte, and Rosemary, were invited to the study through a network of social contacts. Rosemary had been a fellow undergraduate student during my last year of undergraduate studies. She completed her degree in spring, when I conducted my research. I contacted her through email, informed her of my research case study, and invited her to be a participant. I explained she must be available for two to possibly four private interviews during the summer, which would be determined by the point of saturation (Creswell, 2013). I let her know I planned to conduct interviews on campus, but I would be willing to travel to her home if more suitable, and that I would seek to arrange our interviews to accommodate her schedule, knowing she lived outside of Montreal. In response, she was enthused about the research, and accepted my invitation to be part of my case study. She was available in the summer, and would come to Montreal for the interviews.

I consulted a respected art education professor for other possible older adult undergraduate students to complete my purposeful sampling for my single case study. Rob and Charlotte were two students the professor suggested. I wrote each of them, explained my research, my summer time frame, and invited them to participate in my case study. They both expressed interest in my research. I arranged a meeting with each of them. I wanted to meet personally and be sure to clarify all questions regarding the project before they committed as participants. I met with Rob at the university. In only a few minutes, his enthusiasm toward my research was evident. He was eager to be a participant, stating that the educational experience of the older adult was something “close to his heart” and very important. Despite his many responsibilities of summer classes, family, and job, he wanted to participate and was committed to making time for the interviews. I told him I would email him regarding our first interview meeting date, and would make efforts to accommodate his schedule. He assured me that he was in town daily, and was flexible. I arranged to meet Charlotte at a coffee shop near

the university campus. We discussed my research and I explained the details of what would be expected as a participant. She was eager to contribute, and let me know the earliest time she could meet for an interview.

I explained to each participant that every interview would be approximately an hour in length. Each participant expressed a belief that my research was important to education. They were passionate about their experience and eager to share it, which furthered my curiosity as to what they would share. I was thrilled. Their enthusiasm inspired me, despite my nervousness to actually start. I would take one step at a time. After meeting my participants, I sent each a consent form that outlined research, the interview protocol, and their ethical rights and protection, assuring their identity would be protected and they could withdraw from the research at any time without question. I brought a hard copy to the first interview to sign before proceeding.

In this way, the case study is intrinsic as well as instrumental in intent (Creswell, 2013, p. 98). The intrinsic intent was to gain understanding regarding the older mature student's motivation for, and experience in, returning to higher learning in Art Education. Instrumentally, the case study provides vital considerations for practical knowledge transmission and development for a changing student population, the value of wisdom in education, and the importance of inclusivity, empathetic regard, lifelong learning, and the lived curriculum. Using a case study approach, a holistic and collective understanding of the student-teacher roles and identities within university education is achieved for generative educational awareness and transformation.

### **Grounded Theory (GT)**

In addition to case study, my research approach is guided by grounded theory methodology in which theory comes last in the research process (Mason, 1998; Salada, 2011, Creswell, 2013). The research process is heuristic, for ongoing, new discoveries that lead to further inquiry and exploration. The inductive, rather than deductive, method



of knowledge discovery supports a collaborative process necessary in life writing and values the use of verbatim quotes that not only describe, but brings holistic understanding for accessing action for change (Glaser and Straus, 1967, p. 135). Suitable for my topic and study, the approach provides for innovative perspectives regarding the mature adult student and teacher education, and emergence of theoretical perspectives regarding implicit issues concerning mature adult students becoming teachers.

I am guided by a form of grounded theory centered in the “interpretive tradition of qualitative research” (Creswell, 2013, p. 287). Prompted by Charmaz (2013; 2011), it is referred to as a “constructivist” approach to grounded theory (p. 287) and it is less structured than some grounded theory approaches. My role as researcher is not minimized, but incorporated and the “personal values, experiences and priorities,” of participants contribute toward the diverse local worlds, multiple realities and complexities of particular worldviews, and actions of my participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 87). Through the intimate inquiry into the individual experiences of each participant, discovery of “embedded, hidden networks, situations, and relationships” that “make visible hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity” emerged in the study and were further investigated (Creswell, 2013, p. 87). Through life writing, this is expressed by the older adult students’ values and knowledge, gained through life, leadership, and family experience, which comes into focus as they experience learning contexts with younger teachers and fellow students. As the GT methodology is often used in areas of social justice, grounded theory recognizes the context and conditions that exert influence on the phenomenon of study (Charmaz, 2011), or the older adult student’s experience of returning to university to pursue a teaching career, a career program that is most often selected by young female teachers. Charmaz’s (2011) “constructivist revision” offers six guidelines that suit my intentions and prove pertinent to my topic and process of study:

(1) Rejects claims of objectivity; (2) locates researchers' generalizations; (3) considers the researcher's and participants' relative positions and standpoints; (4) emphasizes reflexivity; (5) adopts sensitizing concepts such as power, privilege equity, and oppression, and; (6) remains alert to variation and difference (p. 360).

Herein, constructivist grounded theory approach promotes empathetic understanding for a "re-envisioning" of life (Charmaz, 2011, p. 362), rather than the goal of "singular truth" (Wuest, 1995, p. 131). Open to varied multiple outcomes, the GT approach honours the emergence of diverse accounts, highlighting disparity and contention or conflicts, and difficulties between contributors' accounts, as well as common interpretations, consistent with postmodern epistemology, recognizing multiple explanations of reality (1995, p. 134, 127). Theory is then a living process and never a "perfected product" (Glaser & Straus, 1967, p. 32). Each experience affords its own subjective interpretive variance for generating multiple understandings as well as theoretical outcomes. My participants' contributions, along with my own, provide rich considerations toward the experience of the mature older adult preparing to be teachers in a university milieu.

The approach of grounded theory is conducive to the method of life writing as a process of gathering and analyzing my research data. Life writing as "authentic ways of truth telling to face the conditions of our own lives and those of others, and to reimagine and remake our worlds in imaginative ways" (McKerracher & Hasebe-Ludt, 2014, p. 120) is fitting within the experiential, explorative and inductive grounded theory process and outcomes, where theory is "not pre-applied to the data" (Salada, 2011, p. 7), but instead emerges through "analysis of interview transcripts appropriately coded to construct the actions at work" in my participants' experiences (p. 7). Entry into the in-depth experiences and perspectives of older adult student personal and social experiences promotes a "reaching out from self to others" (McKerracher & Hasebe-Ludt, 2014, p. 120) in academia, for greater understanding of the mature student and the

influences that effect academic experience. As purported by Salada (2011), GT is a methodology for “understanding human processes” (p. 6). Through an ongoing process of comparing emerging concepts, and constant analysis of the “actions, interactions, and social processes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 84) of Rob, Rosemary and Charlotte, as well as my story, revealed through interview and the life writing process, GT provides for an in-depth study of human *being*—the older adult student becoming a teacher.

### **Arts-Based Research**

I recognized that the most effective method to access lived experiences in this study was to combine qualitative interpretive approaches with arts-based research. Arts-based research approaches have become a valuable “method for meaning-making and for re-presenting knowledge across disciplines” in the last 30 years (Conrad, Smyth & Kendal, 2015, p. 27). And being an artist, researcher, and art teacher, the language of art is a natural and appropriate form of expression for me. The varied depths of artistic representation and interpretation provide new perspectives for expanded understanding. I draw on a breadth of perspectives of many committed scholars, including Aoki (1987/2005), Chambers et al., (2012), Barone (2009), Barone and Eisner (2012), Bresler (2006), Knowles and Cole (2008), Pinar and Irwin (2005), Leavy (2009, 2013), McKerracher and Hasebe-Ludt (2014), Sinner et al. (2015), and Sullivan (2005, 2006, 2010). Arts-based methodology provides rich research processes and outcomes in my study of the student experience of mature adults.

As defined by McNiff (2008), arts-based research is “the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expression in all the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies” (p. 29). The practice of arts-based research “enhances understanding of the human condition through alternative (to conventional) processes and representational forms of inquiry” (p. 59) and makes “scholarship more accessible” for “reaching multiple audiences” (p. 59). I seek to make

my research understandable beyond academia. Therefore I chose the literary arts-based research of life writing to create stories of learning, and to “explicitly ground the process and representational form” through its “expansive possibilities of scholarly inquiry for purposes of advancing knowledge” (p. 59). Through life writing the experiences of mature adult students, I strive to provide prolific understanding for future older students who will return to postsecondary education to pursue a teaching degree, their families, and their younger cohorts of students and teachers.

### **Life Writing**

The practice of the art form of life writing is advocated by McKerracher and Hasebe-Ludt (2014) who state that life writing is “an original literacy of the self-in-relation that is a powerful methodological tool for articulating the experiences of teachers and learners” (p. 119). Life writing reflects what is often regarded as an ancient teaching method of story, a conceptual tool that not only describes, but shows the experience of the mature learner for a deep learning encounter that nurtures an “ethos of care and empathy” (McKerracher & Hasebe-Ludt, 2014, p. 117). As readers imaginatively embody the lived experience rendered in story, an empathetic understanding of others and self is nurtured, resulting in what I believe to be a more humane and democratic education.

Life writing my own experience of returning to university as an older student, and the experiences of Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte allowed for a reflexivity characteristic in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013, p. 216). As inquirer, writer, and a fellow contributor, the “bias, values and experiences” (p. 216) that shape my interpretation of my own, and other mature learners’ experiences are valuably acknowledged. Grounded in authenticity, a key aspect of life writing, sagacious deconstruction of misconceptions and idealisms regarding the older adult academic experience provokes understanding of human *being*. Tensions and complexities of living are allowed to emerge, for holistic

learning and research. McKerracher and Hasebe-Ludt (2014) regard the arts-based form of expression of life writing as the “soul of society,” or a mode of inquiry that offers “humanity opportunities to be sensitive and act compassionately towards others” through “relational as well as self-reflective” investigation (p. 120). The practice of life writing beckons heartfelt interaction for “truth telling” regarding the “conditions of our own lives” and the lives of the mature learner, for a critical and soulful introspection and insight into learning that is meaningful and transformative (p. 120).

As readers engage with the varied experiences of older adult students, this arts-based approach contributes toward a “critical and creative education” (McKerracher & Hasebe-Ludt, 2014, p. 120). Life writing is an innovative tool that helps reimagine the world of academia for necessary changes in perspectives, practices, delivery of programs and potentially even policy. In the end, stories, the words themselves, become “residue left over from earnestly striving towards experiences that are beyond language” and rouse different forms of knowing, learning, and seeing (p. 121). Life writing is a generative and visceral method where new perspectives and understanding of life learning, university programing and delivery can be created.

Therein the subjectivity of researcher and participants provides experiential views of education. Pfaff (2013) asserts that “subjectivity is a pathway to deeper understanding of the human world in general, as well as whatever specific phenomena they are examining” (p. 145). As my own, and Rob, Rosemary and Charlotte’s varied experience took on the art form of life writing, their personal opinions and feelings regarding life as a student called me to deeper consideration of my own story. Sensitivities emerge. Personal issues of frustration or joy in their adjustment and process arouse questions regarding the meanings of success, its process, and university itself as part of the facilitation of new ways of being. Through the artful process of life writing, the organic interweaving of theory and practice became manifest for investigation and evaluation. Human connection, through the personal, subjective

voice, bestowed compassionate meaning-making. Readers and writer can no longer be “neutral spectators” (Pfaff, 2013, p. 145). The imaginative recreation of experience intertwines with our own, summoning not only a cognitive, but embodied, holistic response. The personal, cultural, and political backgrounds and choices of other mature students contribute to discoveries of self and others, learning and culture, and so, the human community. The writing of my own experiences and those of my participants conjured feelings about my own life. I was able to interpret and analyze my own story in light of other mature adults’ experiences and responses, demonstrating the self-in-relation as an active mode of research inquiry. I considered more deeply the significance of the roles we play as older students in university and society, as students and teachers, and perspectives that influence our choices, relationships, and learning preferences and outcomes. Through the use of arts-based methods, palpable and perceivable forms of learning are then offered for further understanding the changing world of third-age adult student in ways that are germane. Life writing is an experience of the consciousness of others, a gained awareness that calls upon conscious reflection for a creating and building of empathetic appreciation of difference. My experience, and those of Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte’s, through life writing, provokes a greater empathetic compassion for an expanded education through understanding.

Smith (2012) introduces life writing as “acts of human recovery, indeed healing” (p. xii). His view speaks of life writing as a restorative tool. But to what end? What does this have to do with mature adult students who seeking new careers as teachers? Life writing reminds us of the “ever-elusive wholeness of [our] being” (p. xii). We are reminded of who we are and can become. We gain a view of a greater whole, of which we are a part. The mature learner reflects the human self in life and learning, in society and academia, making their stories representative tools for inquiry. We need their experience as sources of learning, living, being. Life writings permit us “to feel and sense life responses that have been repressed under dominant dispensations of

worthiness” (Smith, 2012, p. xv) where success belongs to the young. Their life stories speak to a needed recovery of a greater understanding of humanity in education. As four mature learners, our stories speak to our human (student) community, and that we all need recognition, purpose, meaning, understanding, and belonging regardless of age. Through life writing, self-interest, self-protection, and status ideologies become disarmed for the consideration of others’ concerns (Smith, 2012, p. xv). Simply, the stories are accessible. Their experience invites us to face ourselves and others more honestly. My and my participant’s hidden intentions of the mind and soul become revealed. The human being comes into focus for generating a life changing, living education.

### **Methods of Inquiry**

In accordance with accepted practices of grounded theory I gathered my data in advance of completing a literature review (Creswell, 2013, p. 229), permitting a natural emergence of meanings, categories, and themes, and a process of ongoing analysis within the data collection process for an evolving theoretical understanding. In other words, in grounded theory the “process of inquiry begins with abduction,” in which creation of new knowledge is rooted in the development of existing knowledge from a position of induction. This is opposed to traditional research, which holds a deductive stance (Schurman, 2011, p. 152). Inductive findings become substantive when the developed theories are connected to the context of research processes. As Glaser and Strauss (1967) explain, “generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research” (p. 6). Therefore, I chose corresponding inquiry methods for “gathering multiple forms of data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 45) for a “ground up” evolution of theory (p. 22). Interviews, personal documents, emails, and artwork were gathered in the data collection stage to ensure a broad understanding of

the participants' university experiences.

**Interviews.** I conducted six private semi-structured interviews over the spring and summer months of March to August of 2014. Interviews lasted approximately two hours, resulting in over 240 pages of transcription. The interviews were direct and face-to-face, making interactions foundational and central, resulting in the development of strong research relationships over time. Interviews facilitated mutual cooperation and respect, and subjectivity was honored for holistic interpretations. Assured confidentiality of participant identity allowed a cultivation of personal, honest responses and articulations of the older adult participant's experience.

I began the interviews using a collection of open-ended questions (see Appendix A) to guide the interview process and assist my interviewee's emersion of their journeyed undergraduate experience. Time seemed to pass quickly, and I endeavored to be sensitive to my contributor's mental and physical energy. When I addressed concern about these needs they all stated a desire to continue, conveying they were enjoying the process, and they often expressed their appreciation for and meaningful regard toward the research they were contributing to.

We met in a small, private office on the university campus. This allowed for a convenient yet quiet location, free from interruption. I provided snacks and juice or coffee at each meeting, creating a more informal, relaxed atmosphere, as we sat in comfortable office chairs and "conversed." We naturally assumed a face-to-face seating arrangement, adjacent to the office desk, and snacks were placed within easy reach. This is also where I placed my small audio recorder to tape our interaction. Being in a professor's office space facilitated a level of professionalism for focused direction within the interview with questions allaying discussion that was beyond my scope of research.

The guiding questions typically cultivated answers that aroused other pertinent questions, and issues of importance to each participant became illuminated for exploration and greater examination. I had anticipated the interviews would "appear as



guided conversations rather than structured queries” (Yin, 2014, p. 89) as noted in qualitative case study research by Creswell (2013). Contributors demonstrated a desire to share personal in-depth stories regarding a meaningful experience or issue, and I soon learned to let go of preconceived expectations of how the interview should unfold. I realized the importance of being flexible, open, and most of all, “emotionally attentive and engaged” (Riessman, 2008, p. 26) during the interview, “in order to observe and determine the main concern of the interviewees” (Schurman, 2013, p. 153). In so doing, I gained greater understanding of their unique journey, as valued in grounded theory methodology.

The interview questions served to establish a relationship with participants. Rich conversations afforded references to personal incidents that affected participants’ learning, as well as a specification of various teaching methods encountered in their undergraduate training. Boundaries between researcher and participant became less defined, furthering understanding and evoking expansive data for ongoing analysis. Our shared experience as teachers and students, and too, “co-” participants (as all storied experiences would contribute to the research) allowing a freedom for valuable insights to surface and aid the unfolding of their story. The interview process often came to a close when it seemed no new information was emerging and “saturation” occurred, consistent with the Glaserian grounded theory method (Creswell, 2013, p. 289; Schurman, 2013, p. 154).

After the interview, I reviewed my notes, making notations concerning points and issues to explore further in the next interview session. Most often, the next interview was scheduled two weeks later, though sometimes due to unforeseen circumstances delayed this intended schedule. This offered time for thoughtful reflection and for further customization of inquiry. In-between interviews, I began the transcription process. When completed, the transcripts were sent to the corresponding contributor for a member check, an approved verification of the written account (Creswell, 2013). Participants

were asked to read over the transcripts and encouraged to modify whatever was needed to assure authenticity. This data, via the transcription process, naturally enhanced and expanded as some made changes, while others simply indicated the sent document was fine as-is.

**Stories.** From the approved transcripts, I wove together extracted verbatim quotes to generate a composition in a creative story form. This was a process of selecting pertinent quotes that concisely spoke to the phenomenon at hand for a re-living of learning events. This process engendered empathetic regard and greater clarity of issues by using everyday language and real life contexts, rather than scholarly jargon and/or clinical settings. Through their honest openness, I was continually reminded of who we are as human beings. Through life writing, I developed new perceptions that promoted further discovery and contemplation of issues, questions, concepts and practices than I originally envisioned.

The value of life writing as a method of inquiry continued to emerge as I returned each story draft to the contributor inviting further adjustment and contributions for final authorization. Each participant clarified terms or dates misunderstood in the transcription, and new details offered further understanding on my part as the researcher. My concern for accurate “relations between meaning and speech” required continued verification for trustworthy findings (Riessman, 2008, p. 28). The collaborative process assured ethical validation of content for intended meanings.

The revision process also contributed to the emergence of in-depth thematic findings, as the life writing process required close reading for the removal of digressions or details that distract from a focused, concise story that ensured continuity and flow (Riessman, 2008). I was constantly “taking the role of the other” (as cited in Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 120), as themes of alienation, difference, and frustration surfaced again and again as I worked through the transcriptions. Their “beliefs, values, and ideas” emerged as I “re-lived” the often conflicting roles in their endeavor to integrate student

and family life, and financial responsibilities (McKerracher & Hasebe-Ludt, 2014, p. 120). During this process, I was reminded of my own experience, inviting further reflection for greater self-understanding, reflecting the constant comparison of GT that is essential in such research. My participants' struggles, challenges, doubts, and fears contributed toward a greater empathy not only for them, but towards myself, through their mirroring my relational experience. I realized what this means in terms of life writing; life writing is not a "final account" (pp. 121-122), but it generates "plausibility" (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 158) for new perspectives, possibilities, and understanding with each reading, writing, and thus, re-telling. Through remembering, interpreting, imagining, and reflecting on their experience and my own, the accounts forward new meanings, and "new life emerges with each telling" (McKerracher & Hasebe-Ludt, 2014, p. 121). My arts-based inquiry and process of life writing evokes an imaginative "seeing" and "feeling" from another's perspective and so "a reasoning together" magnifies potentialities and compels our ability to care, respect, and understand others (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 158). As Polatnyi's states, "We know more than we can tell" (as cited in Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 158) and this understanding is a worthy consideration when investigating the experiences of older adult learners. Barone and Eisner (2012) expand further, asserting: "Language depends upon imagination to be meaningful. If a reader cannot imagine that to which language refers, the likelihood the language will be meaningful is low" (p. 158). Herein lies the vital power of life writing. It is a process of "deliberation, inquiry and imagination" that evokes the heart for meaningful learning (p. 158). This approach does not provide certainty or answers, but provides something more powerful: possibilities.

Writing and interpreting the stories of mature students then is a research method that begets knowledge as a form of social action (McKerracher & Hasebe-Ludt, 2014). Encountering the experiences of mature students, and their social displacement in returning to the academic world of young students advocates new educational

processes where empathy becomes a central focus. Through life writings, I believe we move closer to a “heart of wisdom” (Chambers et al, 2012).

**Documents.** One participant, Rob, had written a weekly, and sometimes daily documentation of his experiences since starting university. These personal reflections were also gathered as valuable data, for enhanced understanding of his perceptions, responses, and encounters in his university experience as rendered in his story. In this study, documents served to verify stories.

**Personal Correspondence.** Emails clarified background information, and so further aided the development of stories. For example, from Charlotte’s interview, I had assumed she had only one job outside of her studies. When I emailed to clarify, I found she had been working three jobs, adding a greater backdrop to her experience. Personal correspondence served to verify stories.

**Visual Art.** In addition, I asked each participant to provide a piece of their own artwork that reflected their personal self, as a mature adult student. This brought forward a visual expression to accompany the stories, and served to create a fuller portrait of each individual as a learner.

## **Data Analysis**

Over time and through multiple individual interviews, documents, personal correspondence, and visual art, the current “real-life” experiences of each student were examined for “an issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration” (Creswell, 2013, pp. 294, 97). A process of analysis required an ongoing, heuristic “analyzing [of] the multiple sources of data to determine evidence for each step or phase in the evolution” (p. 199). The process involved “organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them” (p. 179), keeping me close to my data, which proved to further my understandings of the older adult student attending university to

begin a new career.

Many common issues and themes were collectively identified as participants' understandings were reviewed throughout the project and clarified. In this way, my study triangulates data sources (member checks, stories, and themes) to verify the scope and value of shared lived experiences (Patton, 2002; van Manen, 1997). In rendering Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte's experiences into life writings, I became aware of key issues for understanding the complexities within each individual's journey. Rigorous reflection and examination of my own assumptions has been fundamental to my research process. Having to remain open to the others whose experiences are not exactly like mine, I interpreted the diverse experience of other mature learners, respecting the "verisimilitude" of each contributor, continually alert to "accurately reflecting all the complexities that exist in [their] real life" in their return to university as a mature adult student (Creswell, 2013, p. 54; Leavy, 2013).

My "analysis of themes" was a constant-comparison that also included an identification of issues that transcend each experience for "assertions" or "an interpretation of the meaning" of the case study for intrinsic and instrumental learning outcomes (Creswell, 2013, pp. 100-101). A "holistic analysis of the entire case study," as well as an "embedded analysis" (p. 100), wherein a "specific" participant's experience become focus, allowed for key issues to be identified.

Charmaz's grounded theory informed my analysis process as it "emphasizes understanding rather than explanation" (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 196). A constructivist, interpretive grounded theory approach emphasizes "view, values, beliefs, assumptions, and ideologies of individuals than on the methods of research" (p. 87). The use of coding keywords was the basis for finding categories and themes. Grounded theory is an "iterative, comparative, interactive, and abductive method," involves a "back and forth" process between data and analysis, as they each inform the other (Charmaz, 2011, p. 360). This process "assumes emergent, multiple realities, the link of facts and

values, provisional information, and a narrative about social life as a process,” which resulted in the formal development of themes (Creswell, 2013, p. 197). This process further “pulled together experiences and shows the range of meanings” (p. 197) within each participant’s stories, thus contributing to a greater understanding of an older mature student returning to the academic realm of university; a necessary task toward a purposeful expansion of teacher training in art education.

I began the formal analysis process by meticulously examining my own and participants’ stories for further identification and confirmation of salient categories “supported by the text” (Creswell, 2013, p. 195). Subcategories were then formed, “representing multiple perspectives about the categories” and were then dimensionalized (see Appendix B). Adopting the constant comparative process, I gathered the quotes of “incidents, events, and activities” within each story and compared the stories until saturation occurred.

This process was in fact facilitated by life writing because the stories presented the voice of each individual to be heard differently, and hearing the voice of a fellow mature learner affirmed themes, rather than resulting in a “codified language” traditionally used in academia (Leavy, 2009, p. 26). Their stories embody multiple, partial, and contested knowledge that legitimized their subjective experiences, much as Bresler (2006) suggests. In my view, their individual similarities emerge in their differences: the human need to be heard, recognized, and contribute; their value of family, life experience, and meaning. At the same time, their individual differences were nuanced with humour and emotion, their unique style of expression, word choice, and emphasis, making each journey distinctive while at the same time offering key themes and outcomes.

### **Validation of analysis.**

Following Creswell’s (2013) qualitative study validation strategies to “document

the accuracy of [this] study” (p. 250), I applied the following criteria to my data collection and to the sequencing of my analysis.

1. Prolonged engagement:

The personal interactions we have shared for almost two years now, from the time of interview to the writing of this thesis, between myself as researcher and participants, has provided the right conditions for this strategy. I respected my participants’ needs in regard to time and location, accommodating their schedules and comfort for prolonged interviews, frequency of contact, and well-being. The long-term contact with participants contributed to building trust between researcher and participants. Through our long-term contact, I came to know my participants, and so my ability to make “decisions about what is salient and relevant to the purpose of the study and of interest for focus” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251) greatly improved.

2. Clarifying researcher bias:

I am conscious of and make comment for the reader on the ways “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations” impact “the interpretation and approach to the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). I begin my study with a personal life writing of my experience of returning to university. Further transparency is afforded as I explain and discuss how a participant’s experience has influenced me, and their underlying value for my research outcomes.

3. Member checking:

All transcriptions, along with the resulting story, were sent to each individual for member checks at each stage of the process. This involved sending participants “data analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that

they can judge the accuracy and credibility” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252) of my interpretations. This partnership with participants ensured a transparent process at all times.

#### 4. Rich thick descriptions:

I provide “rich” descriptions through the stories as shared by my participants; these accounts reveal “interconnected details” and so a “transferability” of information, relating to the experience of returning to learning as a mature student. Also, the use of life writing of verbatim quotes and dialogue, explicit details, and personal voice, provides in-depth rich description and texture to the study.

### **Ongoing reflexivity as a researcher**

Central to my blended methodological approach of case study, GT, and arts-based research is reflexivity (Creswell, 2013, p. 216). By continually reflecting and keeping detailed notes on my research process, I found a means to bring forward multiple perspectives and interpretations that contribute to my epistemological understanding. Such ongoing contemplation and questioning of interpretive perspectives is a means of “communicating the complexity of our lives and our world, in alternative ways beyond linear reporting” (Keys & Guyas, 2006, p. 5). In alignment with GT, concepts “not nameable in formal or traditional findings and answers” find expression, providing “new ways of knowing and knowledge generations” (p. 5). Through the practices of arts-based research, “new understandings of process, spirit, purpose, subjectivities, emotion, responsiveness, and ethical dimensions of inquiry” challenge dominant conventional methodology that “keeps academy and community separated” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, pp. 59, 60). Through diverse forms of inquiry, arts research offers a “transformative potential” of scholarship beyond the academy, and I



believe this is demonstrated in the quality of the stories (p. 68).

And so, my aim as artist-researcher-teacher is “to shape language, so that it conveys what words in their literal form cannot address” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 159). The artistry of life writing is “To say in words what words can never say” for greater “human understanding” (p. 159), in this case, of the mature adult learner, their university experience, and their insights and expansive meanings for education. Through mature adults’ stories, the visceral self is challenged and further examination is called for: We identify, contradict, examine, and reflect. Our lives overlap and distinction becomes blurred. Our experience becomes part of many as the experience of another summons reflection of our own. As a result, “new lives within our own life” are realized (p. 125), and so, older adult learners and their experiences of higher education have a place in research.

My research articulates many of the possibilities, processes, hopes, disillusionments, and ongoing transformation in learning, regarding the mature learners’ preparation for a professional teaching career (Bresler, 2006). Informed by case study, grounded theory, and arts-based research, theory emerges through and in the process of inquiry outlined in this chapter. In the following chapter, I present the stories that were derived from my data.

## Chapter 3

### Stories as Research

Due to many years of life ‘practice,’ mature adult students afford unique holistic perspectives for current student and teacher learning. Older adult students have a “seeing” and “being” that beckons empathetic inquiry and connection, for new and meaningful knowledge creation within our changing society. My three contributors’ reveal through story their discoveries, challenges, and transformative moments in their return to the university.

I begin with Rob’s story. At the age of 49, Rob returned to university to become an elementary school teacher, formerly working in business. He continues to work close to full-time, attend full-time studies, and make quality time for his wife and children. Rob sees life as a journey. He cherishes the daily learning opportunities of each class and interactions with students and teachers. At the time of our interview conversations, he had completed one year of his Baccalaureate in Early Childhood and Elementary Education. With humility and humor, he shares his personal adjustment to academia and efforts to maintain his strong values of family and faith. Rob’s love for life and honest reflection on the process of learning and meaning, reveals heartfelt wisdom and the unique perspective of the mature adult male entering the academy.

The next story is Rosemary’s, whose former pursuit of university education ended when raising her three children became a priority. Determined to finish her postsecondary education, Rosemary returned to university as a mature student and working mother. She invites us into her experience of attending part-time studies to fulfill a dream, completing a Baccalaureate in Fine Arts in Painting and Drawing and a Minor in Community Art Education. Her 10-year journey, which she began when at the age 45, provides further understanding of the joys and challenges that older adult student’s

face, as well as their learning preferences and insight on educational processes. Her story illustrates her process of commitment, self-discipline, and identity development. We are afforded a taste of her reflective vision on self and life, wherein she discovers her desire to enter art teacher education.

I end with Charlotte's story. Charlotte adds a third perspective on returning to learning. At 50 years of age she enters university to earn a required public school teacher certification. Supporting her special needs son and maintaining her full-time teaching position in a private school, and supplementing her income with a cleaning job on the weekend, she takes on the demands of full-time university studies and completes a Baccalaureate in of Fine Arts, Major Art Education-Visual Arts. Yet during her post-secondary studies, her philosophy of learning and teaching becomes more clearly defined and contested. I situate Charlotte's Story last, as her story of experience powerfully illustrates the mature learner's conflict with present university educational programming, philosophy, and practice of teacher education. Charlotte's journey, in many ways, is also a culmination of the previous two stories. She unabashedly reveals her experience, advocating for recognition and value of expanded life experience.

### Rob's Story: Learning more of who I am

*"I guess I am learning more of who I am, what has perhaps always existed, but never realized."*



*Figure 1. Rob's self-representation*

I never dreamed of being a teacher. I was discouraged against teaching when I was young, in the sense there were no jobs; there was no future. I continued on with life, and life happened. I got into hotels, became a meeting planner, editor, and now a general manager of the audiovisual company. I'm not really that technical. My strength is dealing with people. I enjoy clients. I enjoy people. So, that's what I do. That's what pays the bills.

So, it has been well over 20 years since I've been in school. My thoughts of returning to school to become a teacher started when I spoke at church about living beyond your wildest dreams. After this, I listened to a friend speak at the kids club I run. About 100 elementary school age kids attend the club in a given year; a lot come from difficult families. The speaker challenged me further, to live beyond *my* wildest dreams – to do something that seemed out of reach, out of the norm, or seemingly beyond. To *do* it. "Beyond" is the most important part. I made the decision to return to university to become an elementary school teacher. "Teach Beyond" is the title of my journal I kept over the course of this first year at school. My first entry, I wrote:

Teach beyond, live beyond, dream beyond your wildest dreams. It seems almost surreal. Almost, I have to pinch myself. I'm so thankful for where I am right now in this life, no regrets. To dream beyond what I've ever dreamed possible.

That being said, I have lots to prove, yet I have nothing to prove, because I don't need to create a life, I already have my life, and I'm not going to have more children; I can just totally devote whatever years I'm allowed, to do this. I have really no obligations, or very limited obligations. I'm coming into the next five years, or 10 years, a very quiet time in my life. My children will be grown up, even if they have not moved out.

I mean, for the future, there are a lot of interesting opportunities. I'd like to earn a living in this, but I don't need to earn a fantastic living. But to make a difference is

important. I will see where it goes from there. I don't know if I will necessarily settle into one thing and just ride out into the sunset. I don't know if that's necessary. The second line in my journal states:

I really want this to be an adventure, a journey, not just the destination.

If all I focus on is the finish line, I will miss everything else that is happening around me, and the realization that life is a journey and we are not there yet.

So, that is really the theme of what I am doing. It's hard to keep that perspective, because even now, someone asked me this year:

"So, you are done now with school?"

"No" I said, "But yes, I have 3 more years."

"Three more years? That's like crazy!"

But it's infinity if you don't start it! Now I have a quarter done; a manageable number that I've broken it down to. I'd like to say I'm three quarters done, but maybe I will look back, or *hopefully* I will look back at this time and say this was fun. But hopefully, I will *also* realize it in the moment. It is process, not outcome. There is always process, and that's really why I'm doing it, regardless of the outcome.

The first semester, back at school, well, it was a whole process. I was learning how to learn. There is a difference coming into learning again at my age and, well it's everything. Of course, my little circle will talk to me. But to other people, I'm 'creepy.' You are creepy anyways, because you're just a guy, and there's only a very few guys in the class. One of them hits on every girl, so they don't talk to him, and I'm like the comfortable older 'gay guy.' Ha, I don't know what I am! I remember walking into my first Psychology class. There were only 3 other students, and I swear they looked at me and said, "Danger Stranger" or "Stranger Danger," or whatever the line is, cause I'm sure I'm

just creeping them out! This last week this kid said, “What the fuck is that?” I said, “That should be my T-shirt!” because everything I see, I say that. I have no idea. My whole life is that right now.

I do love it though.

I find it interesting how you can just be discouraged in life by such little things, but can also be encouraged. Like when I was able to logon to the Internet at school. Or, when I ran into my first class, but I was in the wrong classroom because they switched my class and I had no idea how to have known that. Or, when a teacher said, “You know, I like Moodle.” I thought, “Moodle? What is Moodle?” And, you don’t want to put up your hand. But people caught on a bit with me, that these things were new to me.

So my first semester was insanely pathetic. I was just learning how to learn. I couldn’t really focus on any schoolwork until I learned how to do school; what I had to do to do it. Like everything. Everything. What’s the best way to take notes? Just how to organize yourself? I had no idea how to hand in a paper. I could write it, but there’s a definite pattern to success in education. It’s an unfortunate pattern, because it’s a pattern based on regurgitation. If you’re strong in memory, you have probably, a 75% going in. The other is tweaking it and giving it back. I keep a copy of my midterm paper from my first English course. The teacher had ripped it apart, but I have kept it as a template for all my papers. And, my computer is extremely organized. This comes from years of doing this in my line of work.

I took 5 courses per semester, and in my first semester two were online. One *Intro to the Library* taught you how to research. I had no idea how to search for anything! Now I can find an article on anything.

One of my first classes, it seemed every person in first year was in there. We were all trying to understand, and at varying levels and ages. I remember looking for the classroom. I saw a lady who looked closer to my age than anyone else. I figured, well, I

would connect with her. So I asked, “What class are you looking for?” It turned out she was looking for the same class, but she was the Professor.

It’s interesting being older than most of the people I am in school with. I don’t think the kids I study with realize that I’m their father’s age, you know? I’m also their peer, right? The peer shines through more. I mean, they know I’m older, been married forever, have three kids who are about the same age as them, but the group that I associate with like me. They aren’t holding back anything. I’m not their Dad; they can say things that I don’t think they would say under normal circumstances. Given the environment, I’m their peer, so it goes through. I listen to how these kids talk and try and understand, and I see things. They like my goofy laugh, and call me the smart one. So, I figure I’ll keep the illusion going for a bit longer. Ha! But it’s hard to maintain. But, they don’t get it –can’t get it. I wouldn’t get it. They don’t get the responsibilities I have in life. Nor should they. It’s not their fault or burden.

I can’t do an “all-nighter,” and rarely work past 8:00 pm; I don’t want to either. I can’t. I’m tired. I get up at 5:00 each morning. Every night I try as much as possible to have supper and go for a walk with my wife, and also watch one show with my kids. These are critical things. I can’t stay up doing papers. I do the best I can, then that’s what teachers get. I’m not going to rework it over and over; at a certain point I just shut the book on it.

In my journal, I compared it to juggling, not that I know how to juggle, but I understand the concept behind it. If there’s three balls, the one you have to focus on is the one coming down. One is safe in your hands, and one’s going up, but only one is important. So I constantly remind myself of which one I have to focus on. It would be the one coming down. Once you get it, there’s another one coming down, and you focus on that one now. There’s three or more, but there is one you have to shift your attention to at any given time. And that is the analogy for returning to learning for me. That is what it is all about.



But, there are certain periods of the semester that are harder. I know I only did one year, but still, I did one year. It will be different courses each semester, some heavier, some easier. This summer, I'm playing on an even playing field. I'm taking only one course and everyone else in class is working summer jobs. Now I'm at the advantage, because I find this incredibly calm. There is no danger of failing. I'll probably get a very good mark in it.

They say:

"I have to get up tomorrow and work."

I say, "Well that's good!"

But, I couldn't have asked for a better result of this year. The unfortunate of the fortunate is that I went in wanting to survive, and I came out excelling. This has set the bar very high, and so I now have a very high standard of achievement to keep up. You see, after high school, I went to CEGEP and took business. Why? Because the line, "If you're smart, you go into science; if you're not so smart, you go into socials; and if your average, you go into business or commerce." That's what I believed. So, I went into commerce, nowhere near any of my passions. I failed for a number of reasons, probably just lack of discipline. I had no passion. I did graduate, but it took me an extra year. I left school at that point. What was left in my mind was that I fail at school.

For 25 years I carried that. I had to break that in my first semester of university. But it was challenging. I remember talking to a professor who helped me see that I'm not a failure. Success is the pattern. Failure is not the pattern. Failure was the exception. But it was a hard, a hard shift to make. Old thought patterns are so very, very overwhelming. But, now I go into school and I don't assume I'll fail. In fact, I won't fail – I don't fail. I don't fail! Even classes that I didn't like I did exceedingly well in, partly because I wanted to prove I could. Success, I think, is application. If I can apply it somehow to my life, that's a key and I think I'm able to do this due to maturity.

The art classes were totally different from my other education classes. All the insecurities of being a child were brought to the surface. I have always considered myself to be creative, but have always made a very clear exception to that rule: art. Yet, I had to just go forward. For the first class we were asked only one thing: to stare at the other person and draw. I didn't realize it then, but the playing field was being made equal. I was given a reason for it to not look as one would imagine a portrait should look. The freedom it brought! It was a revelation moment. For me, it was a success. The art class was quite a bit to take in, and a lot to begin to overcome. The damage done to a child can at times last a lifetime. That day was an important first step in reversing the damage.

The classes continued to be a journey deeper into the unknown, which, in many ways, is the known. It was new, while in other ways I found myself falling into assumed perspectives. It was a challenge to stay within the lines, even though that request was never made. It's all I knew. Then, a student showed her painted color wheel. My response was "What the hell is that?" Ha! Not the right response, to say the least! But her wheel didn't even resemble a wheel. And it definitely was not an accidental crossing of the line. It was a purposed, deliberate gesture. Art in many ways is a reflection of who we are and how we choose to express ourselves. I really don't want to have to live out my life inside the lines. Then, when working with clay, I realized that clay and our lives have a lot in common. The finished product is simply a reflection of what was seen all along in your mind, the imagined outcome. There is no right or wrong.

Entering my last art class, I remembered the fear and trepidation I felt the first week of the course. I did not leave the course as I entered. Through art, I realized I can enjoy the process regardless of the outcome. I can draw outside the lines and rediscover. For so long, I had focused only on what it ended up looking like. I had missed the point. Art, like life, is a journey. Enjoy the ride. There is so much more to learn and discover. I am thankful for having my mind and eyes opened to this.

Yet I have to say in other courses in education, the hardest thing is that I don't have a support group. I'm not going to be invited to someone's house for a PJ party to do our study notes! I'm not going to be on Facebook with them. A girl said to me last year, "Did you see all the practice quizzes for Chem?" I said, "No." She said, "You aren't really connected, are you?" She then gave them to me.

But, there's a break, right? So, it's challenging because I don't have anyone to really study with. The day of a quiz, if I went to class an hour or two before, I will bump into a couple of people and sit with them and possibly review. But I'm not invited. I'm not in that particular little group. I could ask "Could I be in the loop?" but I feel like I would be "free loading" to do that. That's a challenge, because it is helpful to study with other students.

Once I asked my Psychology teacher a question. She's very smart. She looked at me like, "How can you be so stupid?" That's what it felt like. I was to write a paper and include a certain concept, but I didn't understand the term. She looked at me like, "How can you not know?" And I had no idea. I said, "Trust me, I need your help right now, but I will be able to succeed on my own and move further away." That is actually 'The Zone of Proximal Development,' or something like that, which means: "I need your help right now. You are the expert. I'm going to stay close to you. You'll teach me. Then I'll move away, and I'll do it by myself." A lot of people learn that way. I just needed to understand.

Those are the things I lack. Support. As mature students, we don't have that. I don't even have the ability to cheat. My eyesight has gone over the last two years, so I can't see far enough. It's just a totally different world. It's like you are, in a lot of ways, an island. Everyone shakes my hand, likes my laugh, but if I fail, I fail on my own. I do need help.

As a working mature student, support comes in different ways. I'm in different worlds. My loyalties are divided. My biggest frustration is that everyone views your life

as a portion. Work views me as a worker and wants 100% from me. School views me as a student, and wants 100% from me. I have my children, and they want 100% of me. And my wife wants her husband. Everyone wants 100%. But that's too many percent. Eventually you run dry, right? So balancing is the important thing. People who work for me, or my bosses, we don't talk about school. So there's no support. They support me as much as giving me a pay cut, and allowing me to work and go to school, which is what I signed up for. That's fine. That's fair.

My wife's sees everything, and very supportive. But like everything, it's a challenge. I know I'm inspiring some people. In a way that is support. I'm also supported when someone asks me, "How is it going?" But it doesn't happen that often, which is fine. I mean, we know how it is going. My children support me as much as they can support me. Then again, when it gets in their way, it's a different story. And I understand! They didn't sign up for this, eh? They will understand some of the challenges and the rewards, in time; especially when they go through the similar journey.

So, I don't get a ton of support, but I don't get a ton of lack of support. Most teachers realize this valid complication, because we can't compete at the same level as the younger students. We are not trained the same way. Rather than memorizing specific terms, I remember meaning, application, or the practical use of something. I won't know the *term*, and that may or may not be important. I guess if you are talking amongst scholars, but talking to a parent, or understanding a child, I think that's more important than the terms. But at the same time there is definitely a strong sense of community within the circle of students I am in. Within the program, I don't feel like an outcast at all. I feel like I belong.

They could use mature students more in university, especially in classes. Give us a platform to express ourselves, because it is different. I mean, I agree and disagree that credits are credits and you have to earn them, but I look at the ridiculousness of

registering for the course, “Communicating with Parents.” The lady in charge says, “No, you don’t have enough credits for that.” I think, “My word! I think I had three children!” They’ve gone through almost all elementary school and high school, you know? But I can’t take it.

Life experience is not considered.

We’ve made a mistake because we put education on this single track in our life. If I had known then what I know now, I may have been better served by having just taken classes I wanted at the time. I would have credits now. Yet, I wouldn’t have the experience I have. But I would have liked a few credits as well as life experience. If I could change one thing: give me 30 credits or quarter of a century. Or at least let me take the course “Communication with Parents” without 30 credits! Yet the advantage though is that I have life experience! I think it’s the largest advantage. I have the ability to see what is applicable, and hopefully retain it. I don’t take all the information. As you age, you see what is important.

I mean I could give more to the classes I am in because I had life experiences. I view things differently, just as I benefit from those around me, and there is more of them. It’s an unfiltered world I’m living in, right? But in education we don’t treasure each other in a class setting. I mean students and teachers. We don’t try to understand who’s sitting beside you, who has a whole lot of experience, lacks in a lot of things for sure, but in other things, a wealth of experience. Teachers don’t have time for it, but it’s unfortunate. There are opportunities that are missed. Only a handful of people have asked anything about my life, you know? And I’m not saying it’s critical, but I just think it adds an insight. It adds a different level. If I was a director of the program, I would want to sit with me because I’d give an unfiltered, uncensored opinion and perspective on things. I’m not nervous about saying something, and maybe they didn’t realize something they are doing doesn’t make sense. When I started the winter term, I wrote in my journal:

There is apprehension, but far less than what I experienced in September. I know I can succeed, even though God has known it all along. I am nervous and excited at the same time. I know this is where I am supposed to be. My only concerns are how to balance work and family. I am so blessed to be able to live the life I am living.

So, I really try to, I try to be positive. It's hard, it's hard. But honestly, it's been fantastic. Honestly my hope was that I would survive. I had no idea what to expect. I mean 'university' was this world that was up on a pedestal, and I'd often say, "Ah, he's smart. He went to university."

But I don't know if that's always true. I'm realizing now, I am smart. And I'm not any smarter necessarily today than I was last year. I have different knowledge. I've learned how to learn, but my core intelligence has not shifted. What I had going in, I have now. My memory is definitely improving, but maybe the biggest improvement has been a realization that I can succeed. Maybe that's the number one achievement. Or, maybe it's the fact that I'm understanding how to learn. The second semester was by far easier than the first, because I didn't spend the first month panicked. I guess I am learning more of who I am, what has perhaps always existed, but never realized.

People are in awe of me to be in school. The 'wow' factor is good. I guess that's the reward and the fun end of it; not so much that I'm in university, but I'm challenging people to think beyond where they are right now, no matter what they are doing. I mean, I realize now, university is not a thing way off in the distance. It's attainable.

The only challenge I have is time. It's just time. There's more a realization that all these years that I've lived, I kind of wish I had done it earlier. I could have done one or two courses here or there. But, honestly, I don't live any regret of the time I spent away from school, because I had a good life. I still have a good life. But now it's a challenge, because financially I took a big pay cut. I feel bad on a certain level, because now we

are a little bit behind, and it bothers me because I still want to provide at the same level. At some point, we'll have to cut back, you know? My last writing for spring sums up my year:

Well, it's official. I completed a complete cycle. I cannot believe how fast time flies. I could never have done it without the support and love of my wife. Someday this will be a memory, and my life will be but a story I am telling. It is hard not be simply anxious to arrive at the destination, but that is not what it is about. It started as a journey and will continue as one as long as I have breath.

Others think I'm nuts. I was settled and I put a lot at risk by doing this. I put my future at risk. There's a man's world out there. It's not the same. The reactions of men are like, "Are you crazy doing this?" A man who is changing careers, who comes to university, is very rare; it's almost harder, has less acceptance within society, and there is probably more opposition to it. Even if there is approval, like, "Oh, that's really cool!" there is still the response, "What are you doing it for? *Why* would you do it?" It's difficult. Society still has stereotypes and it's hard. I should be the stable provider, and stability doesn't mean going back to school. I'm told, "You know you won't find a job here."

My friend went back to school around five years ago, and he's eight years older than me. He's a mentor. He was very successful, and he just left it all. He knows. He understands and is an inspiration. I don't need 100 jobs. I just need one. If I believe that there's a purpose to this, then I'm not concerned. I really don't think about work and things like that. I just try to stay focused and not get overwhelmed, because it's easy to. I try to take one step at a time, not look too far ahead, and stay optimistic, you know?

I know this experience will affect who I am as a teacher. I have experience in the real world. I just think I am going to approach things differently, because I've lived in a world that maybe demanded way too much. Certain things have to be done. Don't make

it into its own world, because it just begins to drag you down. My relation to parents will be interesting. A man's input is critical for girls and boys; many don't have it and need it.

Regarding university programming, I had an issue with course selection. You are to pick five courses for the semester. You go in to register, but find out they are all full because those who have more credits register ahead of you. They tell you, "Make sure, no matter what, to take these certain courses. Make sure!" Well again, they are all full. I ended up writing one professor. She didn't answer. I go for the other class, but the other is full. I write that professor and she writes back, "Oh, I would love to have you!" But then, I have to go through the Coordinator, who says, "Who gave you permission to write the teacher? You're not allowed doing that! Sorry! You can't get it." So, I phone the Dean and five minutes later I am in the course. It's annoying! I almost switched schools because of it. It's wrong, because you are playing with people's lives. Then, they only accept some past credits. It's a big difference for me. That's my life!

I am privileged to have access to this education. Yet, schools must continue to change. Universities have to realize time is valuable for the mature student. I can't waste time. In business we say, "Be easy to do business with!" Well, I am the client and I'm asked to give information, and to take certain courses. Then I'm told, I can't have anything. Facilitate my life so when I'm finished, I'm in control and can give back. Again, the situation was frustrating enough that I thought of leaving. You can't just say, "Well, that's the rule, so that's just the way it is." There is also exception to the rule. I think you still have to view an individual as an individual. You have to realize that I don't have the same responsibilities in terms of school. I know I don't get an extra 'handicap' mark just because I'm busy, but they could work with my schedule.

I would also change the marking system. Whatever mark you get that would be your exact mark; not an 89.7% or a 90.1%. You are fighting for and earning every mark you get, and then they just remove 5% from you with no justification? There's no reason. The GPA absolutely makes no sense! It's frustrating too, because I have no



idea what I get on my final exams. It's worth something! I know what mark I got for the course, but I don't know if they are honest with me. Do they push your grade up or down depending on having too many high marks? That happens!

When I first entered the program, I wrote my philosophy of learning. It's a cliché, but again, I viewed it as a journey. We have to focus on building the pathway in the bigger picture. I want to graduate, become a teacher. But no matter how smart I am, no matter how good I do in school, I can't get to the end destination right now. Time has to pass. In learning, we often become fixated on the end result, get overwhelmed, and give up. It's sad.

I'm saying all that, but I'm actually thrilled with being part of this community. It's where I belong. The teachers and students have been real cool with me in that I don't feel any different. I'm not set aside, but welcomed. We all have our fears, mature learners who have been away from school for a long time, and young students who have never left.

Yet, it would be probably wise for most teachers to have lived other experiences first. It would give the teacher perspective of the world out there. Knowing the real world, the corporate world, what people expect and demand of you, just puts things in perspective maybe. It just brings life experience, period. You would relate to parents differently and understand what they are going through. It seems almost like teachers need to start school later in life. It would be good, if it could somehow be worked out. It's important.

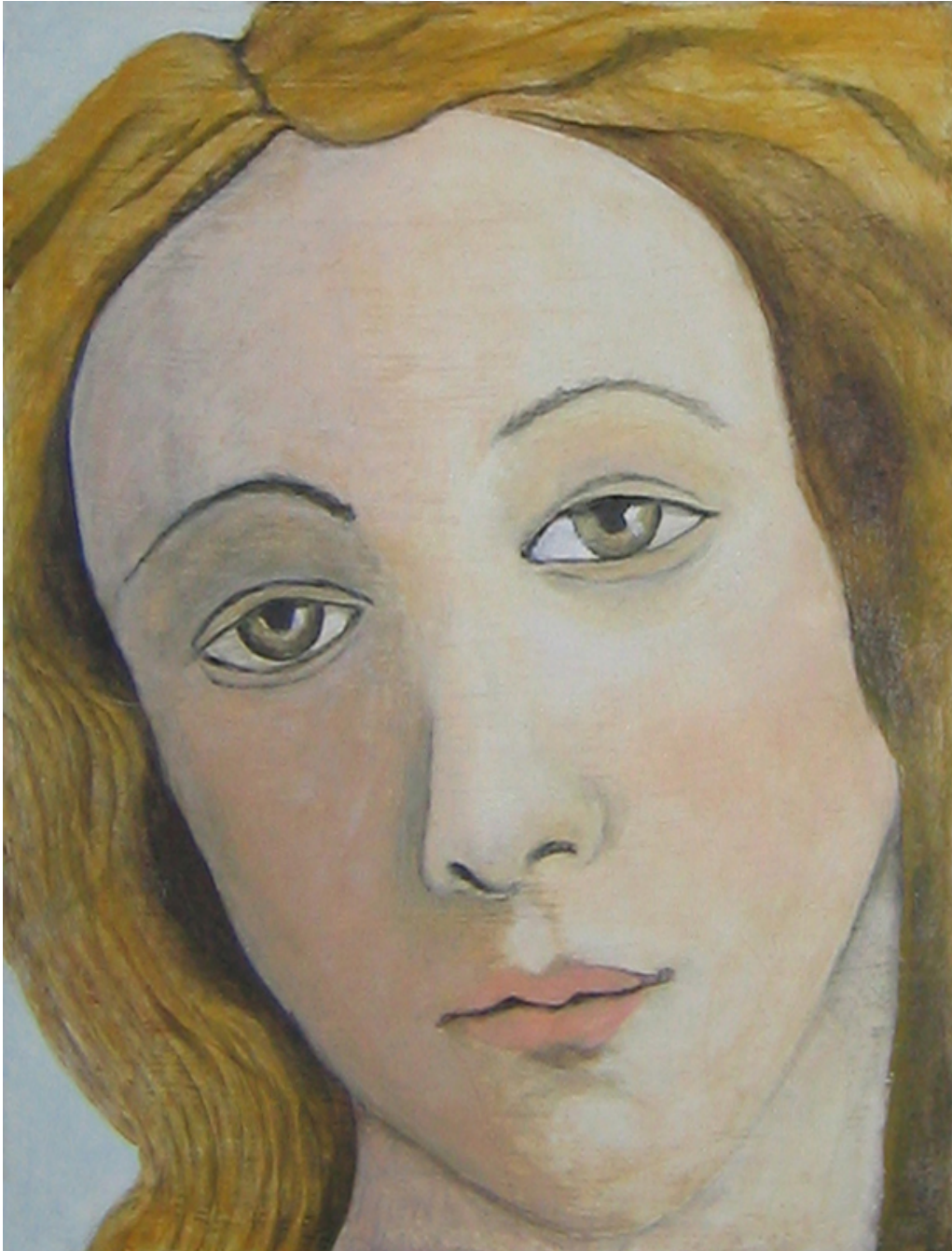
This brings me back to students' life experiences. Again, we are in a program where you could take time in class, to learn from students a little bit more. The three goals of education are 'qualification' and 'instruction,' but the third goal, which is actually the first goal in the list, is 'socialization.' So somewhere along the line, we should be socializing. It means connecting. For what purpose? To create a better community, fit better into society, to be a more functioning, better, citizen. But we are not learning from

each other and we could learn so much. There should be a place for that. It's understanding. But we are not connecting. We would realize that we are all different. We would learn from each other. We could use each other in a positive way, so we all learn. Being a mature student is a disadvantage though, in being able to connect. I'm limited with who I can "group project!" with. I'm not chosen. Kids want to be with their friends. I would too. It's another dimension to being a mature student. It's more difficult in these ways.

But I think more mature students will be attending university to pursue meaningful changes. Our level of health is higher, so life expectancy is getting longer. In the next 30 years, retirement won't be considered as in the past. Those who have retired early don't necessarily age well. I don't know that there's a benefit of seeking the goal of retirement. There may be truth in that being busy, active, needed, and having your mind stimulated keeps us healthy. I view my mind as a field; things take root easier now. A year ago, everything I have said would have been based on hope and probabilities. Now I know.

## Rosemary's Story: A time of re-vision

*These are teachers sitting with a teacher!  
That should be the ultimate exchange type of environment!*



*Figure 2. Rosemary's Self-representation*

I have just finished my BFA in Painting and Drawing, with a Minor in Art Education. I came back to school and finished within the 10-year time frame for completing a degree. I was right on the wire! I had to do it part-time. There was a period where I was unemployed, and so I was able to take a full-time course load, but for the most part I was taking one or two classes a term.

Before returning to university, I had already been taking community watercolor classes nearby. I was on the executive of an artist organization, doing publicity and volunteering. I was also exhibiting my paintings at least twice a year. So my art making was starting to take off, but only in one medium: watercolor. I started to get frustrated in the local community classes. They were often done in an instructor's home, and the people around me, I could tell, weren't that serious about making art. Painting was more a past time, a hobby, not to really take on and experience it more. I found, too, I was getting frustrated with watercolor and wanted to explore oils and acrylics. That was really the impetus for me to take on coming back to University.

So I applied, but I got rejected the first time because my portfolio didn't comply. I was working during the days when they offered portfolio-coaching sessions.

I said, "I'm not going to take this!"

There was this wonderful person who worked in the registrar's office. I took it upon myself to approach him directly.

"Look, I've been rejected, but I don't feel that you have really considered what I have to offer here."

"Try and write an appeal letter and we'll reconsider your case."

I sent him my letter, by fax. From what he had said, I somehow sensed that there might be a breath of hope. And sure enough, soon after, I received an acceptance letter. I was thrilled!

They accepted me as a "mature student," but officially I was listed as, "Without a Portfolio." So, for the longest time it stated that on my transcripts. Adding to this, I had to

do additional credits, for the 'Mature Entry Program.' I came with my credits from McMaster University, but only six credits were accepted.

Later on, I burned my letter of rejection! I burned it as a ceremonial type of saying goodbye to the rejection. I don't take on things where I feel as though I can be rejected. Usually I am conservative and try to take on challenges where I have some margin of winning, right? And, uh, that was a shocker for me, because hey, I thought, my portfolio was okay. I had already exhibited some of what I submitted. But sure enough, it wasn't.

So, anyway, my "Without Portfolio" remained on my transcript until I was accepted into the Art Education program. I did follow the guidelines this time. I came up with a very strong portfolio. I had a substantial amount of artwork to show then. So "Without Portfolio" is gone now from my transcript, and that was important.

But I would have never walked away though. See, when you get a census, they ask you, "What's your parents' highest degree of education?" My mother had only a grade ten, and that bothered me. My father had technical school level education; he never went to university. I want to have my kids be able to "check" their Mom had a "university education." So, I kind of did it for them, but also for myself, because now I can say, "Highest Education? Yes. University."

Too, when I was a young student, I was actually discouraged from doing art. So I didn't. Yet after many years, I still wanted to pursue art. I knew I wanted a career change at some point, so it was a goal to teach part-time. But after a certain point at university, I figured this would be my job. I like the art world. I like the creative aspect to it. So it hits all bases. You can surround yourself with beauty and have power of doing that. You can change your world. Art is very powerful!

I had heard of the university's Fine Arts program way back and thought, "Oh, wouldn't that be wonderful!" Then you just forget about it; life gets in the way and you think it's impossible. I met my husband at McMaster University. We moved here on a two year contract and we've been here 20 years. After a while I came to the realization,

“Hey, it’s doable. I’m here now and I can actually participate in this thing.” So that was also part of my returning to university, to fulfill a long held dream of many, many years.

Returning to university has given me a lot of confidence. There’s something about getting permission in life to do the things we want to do, and this is very often the case for women. Women of a certain age feel the need for permission to do stuff like make art, and not just continue to clean the house or do traditional female things! When I look at my diploma up on the wall now, I say to myself, “This is who you are now!” It partly defines who I am, and it feels different. I think about myself in a different way. I feel recognized, more aware of who I am.

I didn’t come to university to be an art teacher. My first attempt to return to university was a BA program in English, at McMaster University. I couldn’t keep going because my kids were too young. I just dropped it for 15 years. Then, I had started writing a book for young adults. I wanted to illustrate it. I wanted to take on drawing, but in a narrative way. That’s actually why I drifted toward Fine Arts.

As far as going back to school, my family was supportive, to a certain extent. I don’t think my family really had a choice. They knew this was something I had wanted to do for a long time. I guess they could see how happy it made me, and the enjoyment I got out of it.

When I first returned to university it was difficult, because my sons were a lot younger. Taking studio classes, I needed space to work. I’m the type of person that I really didn’t like working downtown in the spaces that were given to us. They were crowded, and to bring all your paraphernalia along and to try and create a workspace, I found that it was hugely challenging. So in the first few years I did most of my work at home, even though I didn’t really have a studio space to work in. But to have mom painting wasn’t strange to them. I would set up my stuff in my dining room on a Sunday and work all day. It got easier as they started doing their own thing and we got into a new routine, so it worked out.

I have a full studio room now, since my oldest son moved to the basement. But before this, I had to interrupt my family's environment to do my art work for school. They knew I was fulfilling something, getting it out of my system, so they were fine with that. Also, I paid for university from my pay cheque, strictly semester-by-semester. So for that part, it went okay.

I didn't come from CEGEP when I returned to university; I had to do the first level Drawing and Painting classes. I'm actually glad, because I had some amazing instructors. So it's good. It was a bit of a shock for me, because these classes did not teach a traditional method of painting and drawing. The professor's approach was of a conceptual nature, and not focused on getting the tools and skills training. I did adapt and it was okay. I actually use some of what was taught in the classes I now teach.

Near the end of my Major, I wasn't really interested in registering for the remaining studio classes. I still had to satisfy the credit criteria and I had two options: either I stay in studio and continue, or do a Minor in something. I had had a discussion with a Painting professor regarding an Independent Study course. I was told I only had to produce three paintings. I'm thinking, "Whoa, three paintings? You're kidding! It's a whole six credit course and all I have to produce for you is three paintings?" That's a long period of time to be without much coaching, and then to get critiqued. I thought, "Do I really want to take this on?" This was something that I just didn't want to pursue anymore. I wanted still more, I don't know. Not to be sheltered, but more direction at that point. I really didn't feel as though my three paintings were going to be it for me.

I then spoke to someone in Advising. She said, "By the way, we are starting an Art Ed Minor program for the very first time in the history of the university. Would that be something of interest to you?"

"Yes, it would, actually!"

That's when I applied to Art Education, and got in. So yes, it's weird eh? I accumulated three more credits than needed, but finished almost "on the nose." So Art

Ed has actually been really instrumental in helping me find my way, because I am teaching now, so it's good.

As a mature student, my days were long. Being in the part-time program, we were always the last ones to register; therefore, I was always in night school. I'm glad those days are over for night school, I really am. I was late coming from the West Island. There is traffic, and it was particularly hard in the winter. But luckily the instructors were fairly understanding. I always made a point of having my homework done so that even if I were to walk into a critique that was already started, I could put my stuff up immediately. I could merge in an ongoing critique and participate right away. I found some of the drawing classes hard when we had to stand in front of a piece of newsprint for four hours. Doing this at the end of the day was a challenge.

Yes, the commute was difficult, and travel ate into my time. Not living close to school, I took public transit downtown, and again, at night I took the metro and then had to catch a bus. It's a huge commitment. It could be a good two hours each way, depending if it was a stormy night in the winter. Then you come home at midnight after classes that could go to 10:30 at night. Oh my god! There were many times I wanted to quit. Many times! I'd be sitting on a bus, saying, 'What the heck am I doing here? Why am I not sleeping like the rest of the universe is right now? Yeah. But I didn't quit. I'm glad. In the summer, I actually loved coming downtown for classes. It wasn't that much of a chore to take day classes. It was a pleasure. Good times.

At my age, it's been interesting to consider how many classroom settings I've been in. I know what to expect in terms of content and delivery. There has been only one or two times I have been disappointed, or kind of let down. One particular professor I had a hard time with. He was a Master's student. I felt that he didn't understand art as well as he should have. There were a couple of students who were having a rough time, and this was also something the young instructor didn't seem to understand.



I've evolved as a teacher since I started Art Education. I think a lot about what I can use to teach my students. My teaching is influenced by my own learning preference. I'm very interested in all the aspects of the artistic process and the materials, to sort of get the full picture. And when instructors speak from experience, they know. They've been there! It gives genuineness, so you know you can trust this person. I also try and encourage the human aspect of connection to art. And it's important to give students a dialogue. And like we were asked to include in our lesson plan, the vocabulary is important. Most of all, I value a student-centered environment. I would like detailed information about the process and improvement, otherwise I will go off and learn it on my own.

I am a lifelong learner. That is one thing I live for, to learn something new, try it out, check it out. I think I can teach a little more differently. This has actually helped me differentiate myself from other teachers, because I'm actually taking teaching in a different direction. If someone's shopping for a teacher and wants somebody who is going to push them differently, then they are going to want to come to my class. So yeah, there is a difference.

I hope to give adults most of all skills that perhaps they have, but don't realize. The technical. I focus mainly on the technical, and that's what differentiates me. The technical could be taught, but the creativity, it comes from within. Sometimes you don't have the tools, and so the creativity will never come out. If somebody really wants to paint, and really wants to draw, focus a little on the technique for a change. This is not how I was taught in my first Painting and Drawing classes. And that model is carried over in Art Education.

I got criticized in my Art Ed for actually introducing the technical aspects of art. The criticism was, "Well, we can get this off the Internet." Well, fine, do you put this into practice in your classes? Everything I was offering in terms of my practicum I still use, but at the same time everything that I offered could have been taken from the Internet

verbatim. It really could have! But knowing it and practicing, or doing it, are two different things. So all of this aids my motivation in being a teacher.

I like to be able to put art into a context in different ways – the historical, the materials, the process, what's behind it, the worldview, etcetera. Knowing this information adds to appreciation. To take in the Art History, take on the worldview of what's going on at that time, say around Matisse, and so understand where he drew his ideas from, adults relate to that. And so I transfer much of my experience at university to my teaching of mature students. The focus really with the adult learners is the learning part. Mature students know why they are there. So I have learned that the best way mature learners learn, or a main aspect, is to trigger something in them.

I believe what keeps me engaged is partly my love for learning. That's probably number one. And art teachers have to be able to instill that in their students. Teachers can't forget that students are leaders at the same time. It's a different dynamic, because of course, when you're a teacher and you have a bunch of people doing watercolor, you are the leader. But students are also leaders working on their own little projects. Art Education students will have to turn around and be the boss in the classroom next. Teachers have to be aware that the "boss dynamic" has to be fueled, encouraged, and challenged in their classrooms.

Often times, I didn't think that this was covered in the Art Education classes. It's a huge responsibility to grow and to take on a community center, all the programming, all the classroom set-up and planning, all the materials, getting that done. Then also, the course outline, some bureaucracy, sometimes fund-raising, depending. I mean it's huge! It's a big challenge to maintain that. Learning should be peer to peer, in many ways. If somebody in your classroom, and hopefully there is a few of them, actually has some teaching experience, build on that. Use their experience, invite them to reflect. Was their method of teaching effective? How? If not, here's the opportunity to make some changes.

That's the beauty of the practicums, yes. But also, get that started in the art education classroom. The in-class teaching is helpful as well. Student teachers have to get the tools from their professors. That's the thing I loved about one professor in particular. She always treated us like adults. I think that's the essence of it. If you think you are going to go out and teach, how are you going to incite an excitement about learning if you, as a student, aren't excited about your own learning, *i.e.* have your class work done? I mean that's ridiculous! They shouldn't be in art education. That was her message. There was one other professor who had this same mindset. But not all of them.

One thing that really annoyed me was that a lot of professors have never been to any of the practicum sites before. They should go and have a look around and see what students are up against. In some places, students have to build a classroom essentially from nothing. And that is a huge challenge. You have to create a learning environment, and a lot of people aren't prepared for that. I think they should have more discussion about that in the early classes. You know, maybe have a former student come in and talk about their experience. There is need of this support and instruction.

But many of the centers where my practicums were held were very well equipped. Everything was there. It's a great place. I had *crème de la crème* of the practicum sites. My practicums were where I felt my life experience was considerably useful, teaching at a large senior's community center. My mentor teacher, who was near my age, was amazing. I was definitely pleased to have her. This was a very positive thing!

Having some life experience in art education class was helpful. A mature learner has been exposed to so much in life already. I see things changing. People are getting more internalized. I've sat in so many classrooms where a professor has tried to get a discussion going and students are not saying anything. They are texting or they are writing in their books, but they don't have their heads up so clearly there is a lack of

interest there. That bothered me when was sitting in an Art Ed class. Nobody is paying attention! That's disgusting! These are teachers! These are teachers sitting with a teacher! That should be the ultimate exchange type of environment!

Professors should take the temperature of the classroom every once in a while. Situations where a certain problem is happening a lot may point to the professor's approach. If this is the case, they have to change it, because they are wasting their time if the students are just sitting there and not engaging. There's seems to be a lot of time spent on the peripherals, the theory or other aspects of teaching that are important, but the enactment, the performance, the relational, and the doing needs to be taught. Wouldn't it be revealing if professors had a video recording of themselves talking about readings, and the class is sitting there on Iphones, talking with their girlfriend, and not paying attention? I mean, what a revelation!

It is a really sad thing to have a teacher teaching these kinds of sessions. Then the pre-service teachers go out and try it out on a bunch of people and get the same reception. The students reenact what they have experienced and get the same result. What, then, did they get out of being taught to be a teacher? It's not good. It would be funny for a student to put up their hand and say, "This isn't working! This isn't working! Professor! Hello! This isn't working!!" That would be a shocker, eh? But, it might be needed. You would think the professors should be more attentive and aware that this happening in the class. We see it. It's out there.

Mature students see problems, especially if teaching is not effective. I am not sure how readings can be presented better, but somehow that really needs to be addressed. Sometimes, when readings would be assigned and reviewed in class, there was a lot of silence. Maybe students didn't read them, they just don't know how to talk about them, or they weren't challenging enough. I found in a lot of cases the information was too common sense, or it didn't really inspire me. Not Paulo Freire, his stuff is excellent. But I just found that the readings in the Art Ed classes were just not that

great. Most of the papers that I read were actually very logical. There weren't many concepts that were difficult to understand. If you had some life learning, it was straight forward.

So how do you present it back in the classroom? I don't think that was done very successfully. The responsibility should have been put back on the students perhaps, to prepare something in a presentation back to the class. So this gives a teaching opportunity; students will explore their teaching skills. They could do research, perhaps make a defense, but certainly present it back. It's a skill. It has to be practiced and practiced and practiced.

Students could then be asked to give feedback on the presenter. You could pick a different topic each week. For example, the quality of the person's speaking voice, and give feedback on their vocal variation, pronunciation, if they were heard at the back of the room, and so on. So it then becomes a learning experience for both sets of people. It would be personal education as well, rather than a dry thing.

The readings are a dry, dry thing. To add something would help. Oh, and half the time, we didn't even talk about an article. Why bother assigning it? These are the teachers of tomorrow! Also, there was very little on the therapy aspect of teaching, which would be useful and worth knowing, in helping a blocked artist. To implement some therapeutic stuff would have been helpful. Also, I would like to have had more of a formal introduction on how to teach seniors and fragile populations, because I don't have much experience with programming for these people. It's actually ironic, because in a lot of cases, students were farmed out to these fragile population centers for practicums, and did not have any formal training on how to support these people. There is a need to discuss working with these populations. Perhaps get some pointers and get some tools going? A mental health worker came in and did a one-time lecture, but I found it didn't sink into me. I believe it could have been done in a better way with some

research and examples that we could reflect on. It's just one thing I felt lacking in. The Minor program must include this kind of teaching.

Also I don't have any background in classroom discipline. I haven't really encountered anybody in my classes who has not been "gung ho" yet. For me, to have somebody who is not interested would be quite strange and foreign actually. I assume it's different in adult communities, and I want to teach adults. The most common problem I find now, working with adults, is that they're blocked artists. The Art Education Minor did not require specific classes on adult learning. And well, in the future, teaching seniors is going to be a big, if not already huge potential for teaching spots out there. They are going to have a lot of time. They have the money to spend on art supplies and will be in good health, so be able to paint and to draw very successfully. It's a very good market coming up. But there are always going to be people who are not as well off physically. It would be good to know how to teach them in a special way.

Other than that, Art Education has been a good experience. As a mature student. I would certainly encourage any mature adult to go for it. There's a difference being a mature student going to school, as compared to being a 20 year old. Most of my instructors were my age, or a bit older, so I always felt like a peer to them. I felt always comfortable, at least for that. Often, the mature student will know as much as the professor, or even more, depending on what it is that is being taught. It is a bit of a freaky thing. It could be intimidating for the instructor, and the student even, because you are moving away from this safe place with a single leader in the classroom now. You've got two leaders, or three leaders. So it potentially could be a power struggle certainly, depending. In most cases, mature learners are respectful of that, so therefore they don't exert themselves. I have really strong relationships with two other students my age from school. They live out near me.

Being with different ages is helpful, because you get to see up close what they are interested in, what triggers their learning. I prefer this diverse setting. They've got

good energy, these kids. It's actually a big topic when you start to think about what's going on with learners. Of course, you can't see what's in their head. You can only go from external cues. It is interesting to observe, because that helps in being a teacher. So in reality, it didn't matter being surrounded by younger people. I met some very gifted young people along the way. I don't know, they probably thought, "Who's that crazy lady in the class?" I don't know. But it was fun.

I always felt it was important if I could at least do something good in the class, meet at least the basic expectations of professors, and have my work done on time. I could see, for whatever reason, that some of the young students couldn't, or wouldn't, do that. To have a healthy attitude towards your schoolwork is very important in Art Education. Mature learners can serve as examples for what students will experience out in the teaching environment. For instance, if they observe a mature learner, their behavior and what interests them, it can help in teaching future students. I think adult or mature learners are more patient than younger students. Adults don't have to have the end result or solution right away. I find that my son and this generation are very impatient. They want things right away, whatever it might be. Many mature learners are much more willing to work over a longer period. I think they are more content and interested in the process. It's a slower arrival at destination.

In this way too, mature students contribute to a university classroom. They are equipped with a worldview and have experience and information, so they put things into context quickly, based on just things taken in over the years. I think that's good, because then they can move on to what it is that they are supposed to be doing. There is a love for education. That's what's kept me going all along. Everything that I got when I attended class was very rewarding for me, and for tomorrow, and the next day. I'm very happy about education.

I used the library a lot. The university library is amazing. There's amazing old volumes that you won't find in a regular library. But as far as library support, research

support, technical support, or any of those kinds of services, the problem was that I was always a part-time student, coming in the evening while these people weren't even around. They were gone for the day. So, I found there was a big difference attending full-time. I think I would still choose to go part-time, because taking a studio class, you really want to give it all of your focus. And art education practicum really eats up your time because I like to prepare as much as I can. I do a lot of planning, examples, so yeah, it takes a lot of time. So I think still I would choose part-time only.

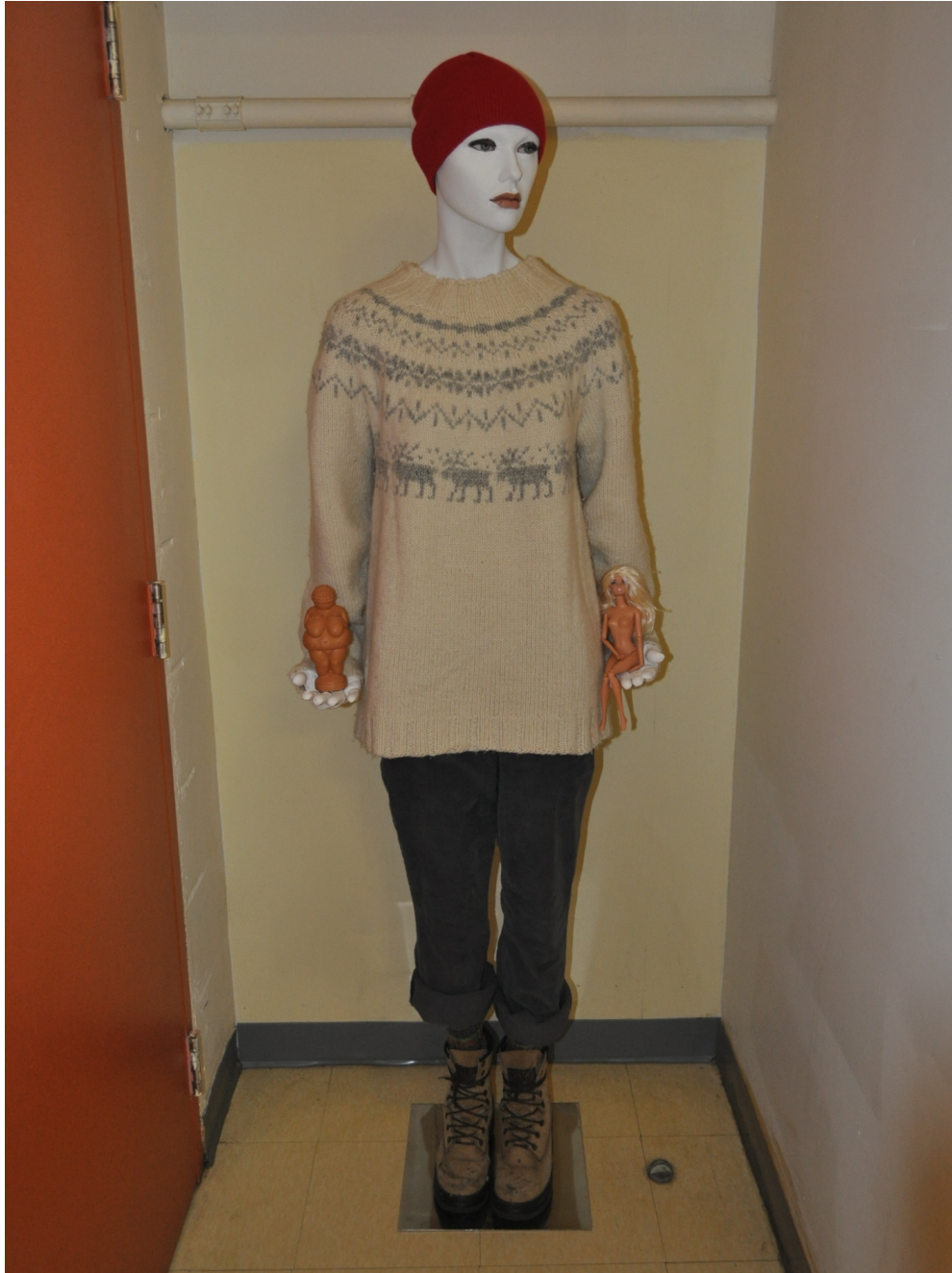
I've thought a lot about something else in learning to be a teacher. We never see ourselves teaching. So it may be helpful make video recordings of yourself teaching. I think this would be very powerful stuff. I'm talking about presentation skills, gesturing, and relaying an idea. There is a performance aspect to teaching, and that's something that nobody deals with really here in university. But it's important, especially your first class. It's an engagement point - some of your students will stay or won't. In the Art Education setting, where a series of presentations are done, every student could be filmed for a few minutes, and then critique themselves. They would see the technical and theory personified. You could give people the option to take part or not. I definitely would have been interested in having myself videotaped. It could be pleasantly surprising and encouraging as well! Those who love art and teach art, the genuine enjoyment shines through to keep you and your students going!

In preparing to pursue a career as an art teacher, you have to instill a love for learning and show that at every opportunity in the classroom. To always end with, "This is only a starting point of what else is out there." To leave the love for learning open ended, so that this could go on and on, is, I think, what has to happen. And mature learners are comfortable doing that, because they possess confidence.



## Charlotte's Story: Beyond rules

*"Get your head out of your ass and teach!"*



*Figure 3. Charlotte's Self-representation*

I have been teaching for 17 years in a private school. I came to university to become a certified art teacher in the public school system, which is now required for my job. Being in university, I have come to realize different teachers teach differently. What I value most, I've seen in very few. In the first few courses of the program, to me, the profs were horrendous and I felt like, "God! I hope I survive this. Do I have the patience to endure this? Do I really, really have to endure this?"

Universities really must take a close look on who they hire. A teacher must not be afraid to take risks, and be a divergent thinker. If you aren't, my honest belief is you are in the wrong profession. Norms have to be set aside now and then, because everybody is different and learns differently. Honestly, I am so sick and tired of stupid systems, and the idiot bureaucrats in university who sit back behind a big desk and make decisions that they have no right to make, because they are not out in the current classrooms. They need to see what works and doesn't.

I had good experiences too. One teacher in particular, a prof in my 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year, was always interested in my input, let me talk, ask me questions, and involved me. There was appreciation of my experience. And I liked learning with the younger student, but I was working and taking care of my kids so I would come to school, study, and, leave. There was no time for campus life for me. Studio classes are different. You talk and eat a bagel, so it's a different relationship. Most of my younger peers probably were like, "Oh you Old Goat! What are you doing? Why are you doing this?" A handful said, "Oh my god, I don't know how you do it! You have this, this, this, and you are going through this!" This came up when I had to go because my son had a seizure. They would realize what my life was like.

My experience was coming to Canada when I was 24 years old, after school and working. I educated all my kids at home with art, gardening and camping trips. I have a child who is disabled. He intellectually has learning difficulties, has seizures, mental health issues, and takes a slew of medication. He is not "run of the mill." He needs to

have special attention. When he went to school, I talked to the school principal at the private school. I suggested a program where they can do something vocational, more hands on, you know? She said, "Go ahead!" I developed the program that this is now what it is.

So I teach disabled children, or "children with intellectual difficulties" and have developed a woodworking program for young teenage students, most of the students are 15 years of age. I created a program in order to give real life experiences. This way, I can learn about my student and see what the problem is. I gain a whole picture of the whole person. What is the problem? Why this child does not know this? What keeps him from knowing this? Why can't he learn this? I mean, a disability or not, there is a reason students can't do something: Is it because there are no actual real life experiences?

I can do so many things through woodwork. I put students in groups where I say, "Okay, you are going to be our math person and measure. I want you to show 'so and so' how you do it and why." The person, not so good in math, has the opportunity to learn from peers. A student becomes a teacher for the moment, which is the best experience you can give a student, with or without special needs. This is different from "You learn it like this. This is how it's got to be!" That is the worst thing you can do to a student. And especially one with a disability.

For instance, my students made birdhouses. We looked at houses and architecture, and the architect Frank Lloyd Wright. I showed them on the computer. I told them, "Look, you can look it up!" These youths are "at risk," with learning disabilities. Some have physical disabilities. They were disgruntled, have a lot of problems, some can't do basic math, and some can't read. Yeah, this is our education system. I was shocked.

But, you have to have it in your heart; in your whole body. When I'm teaching, I'm doing, talking, making. I laugh, I cry, I joke with the kids. And then, the kids actually remember. They even built little balconies for their birds! Again, these were the "at risk"

students. It was incredible. Because they had an interest. They had their fun about it. They made little balustrades, steps, and were calculating. They started looking at different birds, all on their own. What kind? How big should I make the hole? Every bird has a different size, so you measure how tall, how big, how much does it weigh, what size is it? Does the male go in, or just the female? Then we had this whole thing about whether the male is taking care of the chicks, or just the female. This whole thing evolved into something much bigger than I had really even thought possible and exploded into a whole architectural, biology course! What made me happy to be a teacher was, the kids taught me where this can go. They were the designer of my lesson plan. That's how I like to have it, to have my students tell me what they need, or what they want to learn; it's interest based.

I started teaching when 21 years old, and I'm still teaching. I always considered what came to me naturally, how I learn and how does the student learn. I show them a way that helps me, and maybe it can help them. Most students come up with their own method of learning. But there will always be a time when, "I can't get this." I listen to them and say, "Okay, how can we make you get this, cause you really want it, otherwise you wouldn't be here."

I look at how I learn, and I can empathize with every person that has problems learning in our society and designed education system. It needs to change. There is no holistic view, no collaboration and people are totally disconnected. If I cannot connect, I'm not going to study any more than I have to.

Unfortunately, some profs are completely disconnected from what really makes a student learn. At university I had these young teachers who need to listen. If they don't, it doesn't make them a good prof. They have this conceived idea, but it's their idea, not my idea. Teachers should listen to their students. Cause what is your end game? To have students succeed? Or, is it, "Here's my little formula: I see all the answers; this is right, this is right, and I'm done." Honey, you get paid to teach!

Teachers need continuing education on who they are teaching. No matter their graduate degree, teachers obviously don't have enough training if they are avoiding this issue, and, if they are ignoring me when I bring this issue forward. In university, some teachers wouldn't allow me to talk about special needs. I never could say anything! I have more experience, even though they may have graduate degrees. I have degrees in other studies, I've worked, and I've got the degree of life. It's all backwards. I don't know how to explain it, but it frustrates me to no end that a person thinks just because you have an academic achievement, they know everything. When you aren't listening, you actually potentially hinder students to learn something valuable from a person that has been there. Even in community education there will be students with special needs. If you say, "Oh, we are not doing special needs," well honey, the classroom looks like you need to. It's not enough to just be told, "Well, we aren't talking about that." Why not? Why not?

I had one *stage* working with immigrant children, and had just learned printmaking. I was excited about it and told them that I'm not really great at it yet, but we can all learn together. I can totally admit that. But teachers who think they know everything, and don't want to hear anything from students? This is the worst thing you can do, because you don't let anybody share. I'd raise my hand and would automatically be ignored.

I have a Special Needs certificate. I wanted to learn more regarding inclusive education, meaning an education that includes the special needs population. Out of 25 kids, you can count that eight are coded in the public school system. That's the reality of our classrooms. Some don't need to be coded, it's just the way they were taught. This whole public school education system is so screwed up. This is not how I learn. This is not how I think anybody should learn. It's an outdated model that needs to be completely overhauled. And I'm not talking only about primary, middle school, high school, or CEGEP, but university as well.

Instead, it was all about a lesson plan. What for? You come into a classroom, and you can take that lesson plan and shove it up your god knows what! Paper doesn't talk back, but students do. They might have other interests. If you don't get them interested in what you want, or only because you want them to, that's your first mistake. You need to have a student-based interest. That's how you capture them. From there they fly. Then make sure that there is a progression of learning. That is what you encourage and support in any way you can. When they get into a snag, its, "We are in this together." It has to be a relationship.

Many young profs didn't have this sensitivity, or experience. It's not: you are in a power position and now I must listen. This is not how to teach. This is not a good prof, but the worst, if you let people teach like that. They need sensitivity training, like about geriatrics! Well, not geriatrics, ha, but get out and live! Then come back. I'm thinking, people under 30 shouldn't be teaching. They shouldn't be allowed! There was a blatant favoritism for those who adhere to the taught teaching and philosophy in the university classroom. And if it's just wanting the grade, then there is something wrong; that's not constructive learning.

Do you know how often I experienced that? I thought, no one would believe that this is going on in the classroom. Even younger students who had a little slightly different outlook would be wrong. That's what I didn't like. Teachers must adapt and not just say, "This is the way you learn and how it is going to go!" No! There are other ways of learning. It's the divergent thinking model. It's in academic papers and publications, but nobody does it. They just talk about it!

I did have this incredible young TA, when I just started university. He was flexible. I had to write a 1200 word paper. I went a little under the word count, and got an "A." His comments were, "...but you should do the word count, because some profs are sticklers." I laughed and thanked him, and said, "Let me tell you something. You are absolutely right about those profs! But, mark my words, if I can explain exactly what I

think and get my point across, why the \*\*\*\* do I need more words?" I'm not a child, and, "I told you to do 10 words! You only gave me 7!" That's not what it's about.

The age category that I am in is like a special need, in a sense. I have experience. I lived. I've been around the block a few times, and have 25 more years of experience than most of the average teachers and students. So, they might want to consider this. What downright angered me and made me really sad was that I was ignored when I said, "Yeah, but, I have to say..." I was not even acknowledged when I raised my hand. I was literally ignored by the prof. I felt like she felt I had nothing to contribute, or, I was a threat. And, I found with young female profs there is almost this competition. There shouldn't be this kind of thing!

Of course, that reflected on the behavior of my peers. And the majority of university students are nauseatingly assured of themselves. Some were downright mean to the few older students. I got many times really angry. Profs have to say something about it. There was a lot of ignorance, and a lot of arrogance. Sometimes students rolled their eyes at me.

So, often, mature students were disrespected by younger students and teachers. It rolled off me most of the time. At times I would walk out, saying, "I'm just going to the washroom." The worse time, I totally dismissed the teacher, and just had to say, "You know what? You don't know what you are talking about. Good luck!" I believe that a teacher like this should never, ever teach a mature student. I only felt condescension and arrogance. This can cause mature students to feel very insecure and feel, "Oh my god, this is beyond me. I'm too old, too late!"

To some professors I want to say: "Get your head out of your ass and teach! Look around you! You are not teaching a machine; you are teaching human beings that live, laugh, cry, and breathe! Take that into consideration. They aren't little robots." Again, this is thinking from the industrial revolution, the Ford model of teaching. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has arrived. But the education hasn't. I firmly believe in an education approach

where students learn about life and so go out into the real world. I grew up actively learning; this addressed so many problems at the same time, because it's open. You need a general idea. I look at the lesson plans. They are necessary in training to pace yourself, a guideline. But, let's not forget they are an idea! To tell you the truth, one of the only things I have learned in coming back to university is how to write a lesson plan. Ha!

One positive thing I can say is I was able to enter university as a "mature entry." So I didn't have to do as many credits because of my former academic achievements. I didn't even know this when I came in. So that's something I have also learned! They at least acknowledged that part of my experience. I also learned what is being missed. Why do so many teachers give up after one year? Because they are completely stressed, because universities did not prepare them for reality! That's what I learned: nothing is in place to prepare them for reality.

So Art Education has not provided me with anything new. I'm now more diligent about having learning plans for mature students. And, mature learners need to be respected and incorporated into the classroom. I think I'm a much better student now that I'm older, because I know a lot more. I am not the 20 year old that just came from CEGEP, trying to find her way. I know what I'm doing. I've been there. The only reason I'm sitting here is because I need this goddamn certificate, so I can continue what I've been doing. What I love!

I knew being told, "You have to do this and this" was not going to fly with my special needs population. I was going to lose them. I actually got a "B" because I didn't adhere to the "formula" in one of my university classes. But, it doesn't work with these kids. I am here because I want to teach this particular population. I adapted. What did you want me to do, write a lesson according to what is expected at university and then not do it in the classroom? You give me a good grade because I wrote what was wanted? I'm 52 years old. I'm not an idiot! I've been doing this for 17 years. Couldn't



you just listen to me? I eventually wrote lessons and they were about 60 pages long. Each! Absolutely, totally, and utterly ridiculous!

That class got my worst grade, because the teacher was completely inflexible. Do we really need more inflexible teachers? Art is about flexibility, about divergent thinking. The instructor seemed to say, "You piss me off, don't talk anymore. I'm the authority, and that's it!" This is who teaches me? It was one of my worst experiences I have ever had. The end of the term fill-in instructor evaluation questionnaire is not adequate. The expected academics was taught, but that wasn't my problem. There was no room for other ideas! Exceptions were not considered and no imagination. Only follow the rules.

And so, my concern was always the evaluating teaching assistant. I only have a few evaluations. During one evaluation, I didn't have time for reflection because it was more important to complete the art making, that the kids have fun. But then I got points taken away? I always felt like I was rushing these kids for my grades, you know? So I've figured out this is not my world.

I felt I had much to offer in the teaching program, but was questioned on everything. In a half hour observation, I was evaluated. I had kids that would pull a tantrum like nothing, so I minimize choices. You have to choose your battles. It's called behavior management! I had templates, allowing for a successful project, and for students to realize, "Oh my god, I made this!" We are dealing with special kids. I assess their fine motoric. Can they put this together? Apply enough pressure? Hold it down in order for it not to shift? I need to have a progression of learning. If I tape it down right away, I'm taking away their autonomy of trying it first, telling them, "You can't do it." But I was criticized for my teaching method. I have been doing this for many years. My expertise was not considered. I have more experience than most will ever have with this population. Let me make my decisions in the classroom. I know what I'm doing!

I might sound like I'm on a mighty high horse, but that's a fact. I was then criticized by my evaluator for lining up the students. My students have autism. Lining up helps them transition from one program to another. The entire school does this! My supervising staff of 17 years even tried to explain to my university evaluator that we do these things in the school.

It's a good thing because had that happened to somebody else, they would have been devastated. I had the experience and knew my school's policies. Yet, I was to teach as to regular kids. I was watched for a half hour, told I was wrong in my approach, and failed my practicum. This was the first time they did the special needs thing. I thought it would be really good for them to see what you have when you have an entire classroom of special needs. But the site policy was completely dismissed. My reputation was affected due to 30 minutes of evaluation based on a formula that doesn't work in that population and a university program based on a narrow evaluation of what's important.

This was such an eye opener for me. I was so frustrated. I couldn't get over it. I was so angry I went home and cried. I wasn't crying because I was sad, but because I was angry, so angry. To me, it was totally unjust. The way things were handled was disgusting. I was shocked. But, change is threatening to conformers. What about commitment to good education? Do you have to suck up to higher authorities to get opportunities? Why do we have to adhere to this bullshit? Why do I have to do a *stage* when I have my own classroom? Honest to God, university programming needs to be flexible with life. They could come and see my program. See me teach. I developed a program. Would you look at it? Would you read it, then come and observe? Everything they want is there.

In another class, I had to create an art metaphor of my teaching. I teach, have children, have a special needs child, and work three jobs. I work and have to make a living. I took a huge financial loss; I don't have parents or loans. So, I don't have all the

time in the world! This is where design and delivery of curriculum could take into account mature learners unique situations and experience. I did a simple tent as my metaphor, because simplicity is sometimes the best thing you can offer as a teacher. Having children, I learned this. One child of mine has turrets, and had this huge lisp. Everybody told me to take him to a speech therapist. But a lot of kids have that. Instead I focused on his little being. I invested time into my kids, and we went traveling. So, my teaching metaphor came from this. You never know which students you get. It will always be a challenge, and something new. You learn these things traveling. I met new people, asked them things, and learned. And you don't need to be a prof. My boys would go and explore, a natural occurrence in their learning.

I'm old. I know what I want. Again, I'm not a 20 year old that has no life experience. But then, my metaphor was not good enough. I'm like, "Are you serious?" It was my metaphor! I'm a mother and my teaching philosophy has stayed with me to this day! This is what I know. This is what I am. And, I've lived this long and I don't have ten hours a week to spend on an elaborate metaphor crafty thing. I have put effort in a working program that actually exists. And my little artwork is not good enough for a metaphor? I was so upset. How can this be a problem? What do you want me to do? Make landscapes? Build a little Windstar van? That's not the point. The point is my metaphor. My point is why am I doing it and what is my philosophy. Honest to God, just thinking about it drives me mad! When I think about it, I just want to, uh, it all comes back to me. Teachers must think about the student in front of them who you are teaching. Learn your learner. Observe!

You can't just sit and theorize, because theory is not practice. One you think out, the other actually happens. It's like you can think all you want, but you have to be in the situation, and work it out. It's too bad, because as a mature student, I have all this praxis. I have to listen to all the theory, write about it, and go through these steps. I know ahead, half of them don't work. Why not do it the other way around, and then you

know. I didn't expect this. When I came to university and saw all these lesson plans, and a lot of that stuff that went on, I thought, "It's not my philosophy. This is not where I can be useful." I see now I would do much better in the Community Art Education where we can address diversity. It's a give and take dynamic relationship.

Coming to university I thought was the best way to continue my career. I love teaching. I did finish my degree, but the university education is in conflict with my teaching philosophy. I previously taught with nothing but my inclusive certificate. Then the government started looking at our certification. I'm a specialist and work with a certified teacher. I still do lesson plans, or ideas. I share these with my supervisor and ask what she thinks. Because of this, I will keep my job, whether I have the certificate or not.

I am a teacher and there is an obligation when you become a teacher. This is what I realize in my "old age." I want to have a purposeful profession. I want meaning in that. This education is a lot of money and comes with an obligation to serve students in their best interest. If I cannot do that, I have no business being a teacher. If I cannot promise myself I can do the job, then I better stay away from it. That's what made me think I could never adhere to the program. They would kick me out! I admit I am a total anarchist when it comes to education. I'm not throwing bombs, but my opinion.

I want to be an art educator, because life is art. I wanted my certification as an art teacher to help me stay at my job. But I realized I don't want to teach art within the school system. I'd rather be a Community Art Teacher and have fun, and give this fun to the kids, while they are expanding their knowledge about the world. Art is essential. It brings people together. It's a mirror of our times, reflecting what is going on, and makes us think. But when people get stressed making art, why? What happened to them at school? Is this the point that you believed you can't draw? What kind of teacher did they have?

I think Community Art teaching will lead the way to different learning, where you learn. Like back to essential learning and what we need to know as humans, which make us human; to relate to our own feelings to what is around us. You can do that through art. If you connect it to something real, then it loses the abstract. In education you have to somehow present in a real life experience. You look at the stages of the learning process, or, the human being. First you have to learn certain things, but we learn at different paces. So how do you teach teachers to be teachers? I don't have the answer to that, but I basically learned through life experience. Then I had children. My perspective is different. As I said, once you are a parent, you become a teacher. You have to dialogue. I like to help people understand things.

The *stage* program, the way it is now, is not working! It should be every day training in the classroom. Once or twice a week is not giving the whole picture, and I felt disassociated from my school. I was torn between what I had always done and what the university program expected. The program needs to consider we are working with human beings who are always moving, loving, talking, arguing, and learning from mistakes. As a teacher, I need to be continuously connecting with our students.

There needs to be a more holistic perspective at the university level, where the whole is seen. Faculty must stay in touch with the teaching world out there. An apprenticeship for student-teachers, at the beginning would help. Go to university classes two mornings and one full day per week. The rest of the week you do an apprenticeship. Being in the schools for the entire program, the student-teachers will really learn. Maybe one year elementary, one year secondary, then one year in the college; and have these programs subsidized. Yes, have the academic program, you need it; but at the same time, have more vocational training. Also, they would quickly learn whether that's for them or not. It would save time, money, and grief.

For mature students like me, I would look at their experience, and whether they have taught before. Some are mothers, but a parent is a teacher. Have them think

about how they addressed the learning of your children. What worked and what didn't? What would you do different? I would definitely ask them to share their life experience related to teaching, to be sure they know what they are doing.

So, the first year, I would have individual interviews with mature students, and say, "I know you have valuable life experience. You're over 40, what is your experience? Why are you doing this now? Tell me more about it." I would make notes, then make an Individual Education Plan, an IEP. I'd consider where they are coming from, their experiences, and involve them in the classroom. For the mature student, there is a reason, a background, and a purpose in returning. Again, an IEP because they have life experience, you know?

There needs to be an advisor just for mature students, because our needs are different. We don't have our whole life to go do "this," and then "that" for a while. We pretty much know what we want. Adapt a program to support them. Then too, profs who seem to think they know everything are pre-empted from dismissiveness. They would know where mature students are coming from and adapt. This kind of foundation would help teachers become better teachers, too. They can stop being so insecure about mature students. This could be done. Profs have to think outside the traditional program box.

Art has so much to offer. One *stage* had little funding for accommodations and materials. Thank goodness I had experience, because young, first time teachers would have had a hard time. I had special scissors. My evaluating TA had never seen scissors for special needs students. That's so sad! Universities should show the teachers this is another option. I'm telling you, adaptations are very important for even in regular classes. Down Syndrome kids and kids with autism are in the regular school system. You will have to learn how to adapt. There needs to be at least one course that specifically accommodates Art Education for Special Needs.

Just look at what we value now? Conformity, no thinking, and keep to the rules, to keep people in-line, make money, and to keep the system going, and we climb this little pre-made ladder. People who don't, like me, are called idiots and imbeciles, a true description. From Latin to English, "idiot" is "the one who thinks for himself." And, "imbecile" comes from "becile" meaning "cane," and the negation, "im." So, "the person who walks without a cane." These people don't need the support of the hierarchy, the powers to be, which isn't always a good thing. In light of what I've experience in formal education, I would rather walk without a cane!

## Afterword

Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte experiences through life writing provides “an artful way of knowing, moving understandings from identifying research partners objectively as students to more caring and subjective identification as individuals experiencing a series of momentous, life changing events” (Sinner, 2013, p. 3). Through stories, we also experience a heartfelt experience of our own, feeling the unique experiences of adjustment, disillusionment, and discovery in their return to university in the later years of their lives, to begin an art teacher career. We are privileged with an intimate understanding of those whose experience “may have been hidden or unrecognized” (p. 3). Journeying through their stories, we step from the known and enter the world of these mature adult students, who allow us to see the world from their perspective (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) Doing so, themes and issues emerge for attention and reflection and further investigation. Perhaps most importantly, we are offered a privileged intimate encounter with fellow human beings, who, despite their age, are being and becoming; fellow human beings who are daring to traverse a terrain originally designed for a younger generation; courageous older adults, who are passionate in their pursuit to become teachers of art, in their third age.

In the following chapter, I provide an analysis of my data, informed by grounded theory. As Corbin and Strauss (2008) state, an analysis is “a process of examining something in order to find out what it is and how it works...to make inferences about the object as a whole” for a recognition of “meaning” (p. 46). Simply put, my analysis is a process that allows me to “make sense of the data (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). The procedure involves a concise and detailed defining of related themes within my collection of life writings. This heuristic process invites a “thinking beyond the surface of a text,” for a “move toward a broader commentary”, generating greater understanding of the mature adult student in a university context (Riessman, 2008, p. 13). I seek to discover, explain, and most of all present understanding of others’ experiences for a



more collective knowledge regarding important members of the university student body. The following chapter will present an analysis and interpretation of my co-contributor's beliefs, convictions and habits which shaped their experiences, providing greater insight into, and explanation of, their venture back to university to become teachers, as much older students.

## Chapter 4

### Emergent Meanings

My analysis of the learning stories is best described as an ongoing process of constant comparison of the interview process, transcripts that were member checked, and the creation of each participant's learning story (see Chapter 2, Methodology). I engaged in a continued close relationship with the data through each step of this study. This recursive work with my data provided deep understandings of the nuances and subtleties of the participants' experiences, for an emergence of possible themes and subthemes. This involved a return to the completed stories as life writing to develop a thematic matrix (see Appendix B). A thematic matrix is a visual systematic representation of my data, outlining key themes and corresponding subthemes and definitions (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). It serves as a kind of "word table," and displays the data according to a uniform framework. (Creswell, 2013, p. 199; Saldana, 2011). As stated by Creswell (2013), doing so provides for "naturalistic generalizations" from the data, allowing others "to learn from the case" for "themselves" (pp. 199-200). Through constant-comparison, the recurrent key themes that had emerged began to spiral into more distinct themes, wherein sub-themes developed. Themes and subthemes were then defined for clarity within a thematic matrix structure, which became the core of my analysis, and the basis of this chapter. There were many possible overarching themes, yet those chosen were prolific within the stories as mechanisms for expressing the important dimensions of the mature learner's experience. The complex personal and public issues each of the mature learners encountered within their university experience provide for a personal and collective understanding, appreciation, and empathy concerning older adults' university experiences. The chosen themes and subthemes I developed are:

1. Relationships – subthemes: alienation and belonging; identity and roles; support and lack of;
2. Values – subthemes: success; making a difference; authenticity;
3. Challenges – subthemes: Learning to learn; unrecognized life experience; theory and praxis.

In keeping with grounded theory, the emergent interpretations developed without the benefit of a presupposed theory. I acknowledge that the identified themes are reflective of my personal specific disposition and philosophical assumptions, and realize another researcher with different understandings could potentially identify different themes and priorities. The presented interpretation of the data therefore represents one of a plurality of perspectives that can be brought to bear on a given case study. As stated by Creswell (2013), my research “represent[s] an interpretation and presentation of the author as much as the subject of the study” (p. 20). Yet in this, my interpretations provide implications for theory, contributing to a more in-depth understanding of the mature students who returns to university in their third age of life.

### **Theme: Relationship**

Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary (2014) defines relationship as: “the state of being related or interrelated; studied relationship between the variables; a state of affairs existing between those having relations or dealings.” In the context of my research, I define this major theme as the mature learners’ connections and state of being with others, in their university experience. Subthemes further articulate and define the varied aspects of relationships in the mature learner’s university experience. The theme of relationship consistently emerged in the investigation of my own, as well as Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte’s experiences. The perceptions of participants, and my interpretation of experience was clearly in relation to the social contexts, revealing the significance and influence of relational connections on their university experience.

**Subtheme: Alienation, belonging, and stereotypes.** The emergence of the subtheme of alienation, belonging, and stereotype further identified some of the relational terrain within the mature adult's experience. Alienation is defined as "a withdrawing or separation of a person or a persons affections; from the values of one's society" (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, 2016). Relatedly, the mature students' experiences of isolation from the group of students or society to which they should belong, or are involved, was a major aspect in negotiating their path toward a new career. Their experience of relational stress and alienation was conveyed sometimes subtly and other times poignantly. Sometimes with humour, other times with disbelief, summoning anger and sadness. The experience of belonging, inclusion, fitting in and being a part of a group is monumental in their student journey. To belong, as defined in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, is "to say that someone or something should be in a particular place or situation; to be accepted and liked by the other people in the group" (2016). Both the aspects of belonging and alienation were recurrent, depicting the paradoxical experience of being a mature adult student in the university milieu.

Rob's alienation involves his relationship with those outside of school, revealing a social disconnection. His new educational endeavors procured a unique social position among peers. After attending university for only one year, a friend expresses a lack of understanding, and thus appreciation of his learning process, stating, "Three more years? That's like crazy!" Rob's process is seemingly "crazy" compared to the social norm of most 49 year olds. To some, he is held in "awe" while again, Rob reiterates his misunderstood passion viewed by others as a dangerous gamble: "Others think I'm nuts. I was settled and I put a lot at risk by doing this. I put my future at risk." Stereotypical gender expectations contribute to a sense of alienation in returning to university late in life, as he stated:

There's a man's world out there. It's not the same. A man who is

changing careers, who comes to university, is very rare; it's almost harder, has less acceptance within society, and there is probably more opposition to it. Even if there is approval, like, "Oh, that really cool!" there is still the response, "what are you doing it for? Why would you do it?"

He admits, "It's difficult. Society has stereotypes and it's hard. I should be the stable provider, and stability doesn't mean going back to school." The conflicting responses from his social contacts outside school mirror those encountered within the university environment. Through humor, he reflects on the day he walked into one of his first classes, "I swear they looked at me and said, 'Danger Stranger' or 'Stranger Danger,' or whatever the line is, cause I'm sure I'm just creeping them out!" He speaks to a further practical disconnect, "There's a break, right? So, it's challenging because I don't have anyone to really study with...I'm not invited." He clarifies further this separation:

Being a mature student is at a disadvantage though, in being able to connect. I'm limited...kids want to be with their friends. I would too. It's another dimension to being a mature student. It's more difficult in these ways... I'm not going to be invited to someone's house for a PJ party to do our study notes! I'm not going to be on Facebook with them.

Yet a level of belonging is also actualized, at the same time as Rob felt alienated within the same student community. With joy he admits, "I'm actually thrilled with being part of this community. It's where I belong. The teachers and students have been real cool with me in that I don't feel any different. I'm not set aside, but welcomed." In Rob's return to university, new relationship dynamics had to be navigated for his new being and becoming.

Rosemary also reflects a form of social alienation in returning to school as a mature adult, stating, “There were many times I wanted to quit. Many times! I’d be sitting on a bus, saying, ‘What the heck am I doing here? Why am I not sleeping like the rest of the universe is right now?’” In an appreciation of younger students, she also realizes a separating distinction, noting, “I don’t know, they probably thought, ‘Who’s that crazy lady in the class?’” She articulates with humor that her presence is crazy, as opposed to other people her age who are not in university, yet like Rob, she too reflects belonging with those who have a higher formal education, and her motivation is personal:

I want to have my kids be able to ‘check’ their Mom had a “university education” So, I kind of did it for them, but also for myself, because now I can say, ‘Highest Education? Yes. University.’

During the course of her program of study, Rosemary developed “strong relationships with two other students” who were older adults, for a more intimate belonging within the actualization of her dreams of obtaining a degree.

Yet Charlotte frankly expresses a harsh, deep-felt lack of acceptance as a mature adult student in all respects, with students, teachers, and the institution as a whole. She shares an exhausted intolerance for the blatant disrespect she encounters from others, contributing to feelings of being ostracized as a returning older adult student:

What downright angered me and made me really sad, was that I was ignored when I said, “Yeah, but, I have to say...” I was not even acknowledged when I raised my hand. I was literally ignored by the prof. I felt like she felt I had nothing to contribute, or, I was a threat.

She elaborates further the effects of this treatment: “I only felt condescension and arrogance. This can cause mature students to feel very insecure and feel ‘Oh my god, this is beyond me. I’m too old, too late!’” In her effort to have voice and contribute to class discussion, she described feeling silenced, “The instructor seemed to say, ‘you piss me off, don’t talk anymore. I’m the authority, and that’s it!’” Further alienation is felt in relationship with younger female teachers, “I found with young female profs there is almost this competition. There shouldn’t be this kind of thing!” Unable to confront vital educational issues and concerns, she replies, “No matter their graduate degree, teachers obviously don’t have enough training if they are avoiding this issue, and, if they are ignoring me when I bring this issue forward, I’d raise my hand and would automatically be ignored.” She shared a particular response that demonstrates the unseen impact on mature learners, and how this experience stifled her participation in the classroom, and relationship with a professor: “I was so angry I went home and cried. I wasn’t crying because I was sad, but because I was angry, so angry.” As a researcher and fellow mature student, I was shocked to hear Charlotte’s experience of disrespect and her emotional, and indeed intellectual pain. I realize class time does not permit all student concerns to be voiced. Yet this was ongoing. Charlotte’s experiences reeked of condescension and rudeness. In hearing her story, I wanted to blame and moralize. Yet doing so is not effective to change. Charlotte’s story provokes serious consideration of the unique teacher-student relationship with the mature adult.

My own experience of returning to university late in life echoes some of the experiences of alienation felt by Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte. In reflection I am reminded of our human need for acceptance and belonging regardless of our age. Upon returning to university, the mature learner must adjust to the processes of formal learning, but as well, a way of being. My return to university was akin to a liminal space: “...to return to what I left was unthinkable. But I often wondered: Was I capable of being a successful student, and if so, to actually teach? Did I, or would I, offer anything?

Maybe I was too old?" I could not go backwards, but was not confident in my ability to go forward. In this I felt alone, as few models could be referenced, and those that existed appeared at a distance. "Often I was flooded with a feeling that I could not catch up" and was sure I was alone, further alienating my sense of myself as a learner. Furthermore, "being outside the social norm [of university] because of my age" I now realize teachers and students may have been learning how to interact with me, something I had not considered before engaging in these stories. Feeling very much like a young adolescent, coming into new being, I could relate to the young persons who were starting their university studies with great dreams for the future. Despite being an older adult, I had returned to studies with a similar intent as Rob, Rosemary and Charlotte, and younger students too. Yet, having many dreams come true, having lived longer, I sometimes felt undeserving to have more. Yet it was undeniably true, my dreams were expanding; I was still alive and eager for new and meaningful contribution. Herein, I describe an ironic sense of alienation and belonging:

I struggled with the belief that being older, I should do well, if not better, than younger students. I battled back and forth between feeling that I had so much I wanted to say, seeing far beyond what my young peers understood about life, while other times feeling I had nothing to offer. I wondered if others felt that way about me too. I fluctuated between two conflicting expectations: I am older, I should know; but I'm older, so I don't know.

My beliefs contributed toward an ambiguity wherein I felt alienated from a sense of self. Where did I belong? How can I overcome the sense of loneliness and estrangement in who I had been and who I wanted to be. Yet, I will never forget the relief of belonging, when "after two years of general courses, I discovered I could enter Art Education and was truly welcomed "home," for it had been a childhood dream to become an art



teacher.” I felt understood and respected, valued and invited “home.” Yet, I continued to be haunted by the thought, “But would anyone really want to hire me?” Was I really able to contribute, move forward, and truly be a part of the bigger world, despite what had been my world?

**Subtheme: Identity Roles.** The life of a mature learner involves multiple roles, most having been established prior to returning to university. A role is defined in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary (2016) as: “the part that someone has in a family, society, or other group,” or more specifically, “a character assigned or assumed; a socially expected behavior pattern usually determined by an individual’s status in a particular society.” The mature learners’ varied roles involve expected behaviors that contribute to their identity, or “distinguishing character or personality of an individual” and powerfully shape their student experience. Being a father or mother, wife or husband, or single mother, teacher, and/or employee, adds to an often difficult and complex maneuvering and performance, strongly impacting the older mature learners’ perspectives and choices for a continual transformational process as a university student. A complex, sensitive, and difficult navigation of roles, thus responsibilities and expectations wherein relationships are central, becomes part of their university experience. The return to university requires a serious negotiation and further development of old and new roles and relationships.

Rob reveals the mature adult’s complexity of roles when he speaks of his identity with fellow students. His identity as a peer is juxtaposed with his role of being a Dad: “I don’t think the kids I study with realize that I’m their father’s age.” He speaks of his expanded identity, shaped by his perceptions of this age dynamic:

Given the environment, I’m their peer, so it goes through. I listen to how these kids talk and try and understand, and I see things. They like my goofy laugh, and call me the smart one. So, I figure I’ll keep the illusion

going for a bit longer. Ha!”

Yet the role of peer, as an older adult student brings even more complexity and confusion:

You’re just a guy, and there’s only a very few guys in the class. One of them hits on every girl, so they don’t talk to him, and I’m like the comfortable older gay guy. I don’t know what I am!

In addition to Rob’s new role as student peer, old roles continue to demand his allegiance and loyalty, as he explains:

I’m in different worlds. My loyalties are divided. My biggest frustration is that everyone views your life as a portion. Work views me as a worker and wants 100% from me. School views me as a student, and wants 100% from me. I have my children, and they want 100% of me. And my wife wants her husband. Everyone wants 100%. But that’s too many percent. Eventually you run dry, right?

In contrast, Rosemary, a part-time student of ten years, demonstrates a sense of self in which fellow classmates were not viewed as peers. Instead she takes a relational role as mentor. From this stance, she observes fellow student’s actions and behavior, habits and perceptions, and appreciates and learns from them, while also endeavoring to contribute to their learning as a role model:

Being with different ages is helpful, because you get to see up close what they are interested in, what triggers their learning. I prefer this diverse setting. They’ve got good energy, these kids...I met some very gifted young people along the way.

She demonstrates a mindful awareness of her student performance as an example, and in respect for her instructors:

I always felt it was important if I could at least do something good in the class, meet at least the basic expectations of professors, and have my work done on time. I could see, for whatever reason, that some of the young students couldn't, or wouldn't, do that.

Rosemary projects a view of her professors as peers, "Most of my instructors were my age, or a bit older, so I always felt like a peer to them. I felt always comfortable, at least for that." At the same time, she takes a respectful, critical stance towards instruction and teacher performance:

Often, the mature student will know as much as the professor, or even more, depending on what it is that is being taught. It is a bit of a freaky thing. It could be intimidating for the instructor, and the student even, because you are moving away from this safe place with a single leader in the classroom now. You've got two leaders, or three leaders. So it potentially could be a power struggle certainly, depending. In most cases, mature learners are respectful of that, so therefore they don't assert themselves.

The complexity of overlapping and often conflicting roles also proves to significantly impact Charlotte's return to university for teaching certification. She explains the reality of her complicated world, "I teach, have children, have a special needs child, and work three jobs" and so there is little time outside of class to develop relationships with younger students: "I liked learning with the younger student, but I was working and taking care of my kids so I would come to school, study, and, leave. There was no time for campus life for me." She believes that "most of my younger peers

probably were like, 'Oh you Old Goat! What are you doing? Why are you doing this?'

There were times, though, she felt recognized beyond being an "Old Goat" student role:

A handful said, 'Oh my god, I don't know how you do it! You have this, this, this, and you are going through this!' This came when I had to go, because my son had a seizure. They would realize what my life was like.

Her role as a mother includes supporting a son, "who is disabled. He intellectually has learning difficulties, has seizures, mental health issues, and takes a slew of medication." Her role allowed little time for anything extra outside of studies and work, and required a prioritizing time, and an emotional, mental and physical energy. She shows how this impacted her experience as a student in the classroom, when she had to create an art piece that expressed her personal metaphor of teaching and it was not accepted. She responded:

This is what I am. And, I've lived this long and I don't have 10 hours a week to spend on an elaborate metaphor crafty thing. I have put effort in a working program that actually exists. And my little artwork is not good enough for a metaphor? I was so upset. How can this be a problem? What do you want me to do? Make landscapes? Build a little Windstar van? That's not the point. The point is my metaphor. My point is why am I doing it and what is my philosophy. Honest to god, just thinking about it drives me mad! When I think about it, I just want to, uh, it all comes back to me.

She reflected on what she felt was an ongoing need in university instruction: "Teachers must think about the student in front of them who you are teaching. Learn your learner. Observe!" She calls for an awareness of the mature student's unique needs in learning, and for considerate respect of their diverse roles they perform in daily life, "I teach

disabled children; or 'children with intellectual difficulties' and have developed a woodworking program for young teenage students, most of the students are 15 years of age...I have a Special Needs certificate..." The role as special need teacher and mother is in conflict with her student role in class. She explains:

Some teachers wouldn't allow me to talk about Special Needs... It is not enough to just be told, 'Well, we aren't talking about that.' Why not? Why not? ...teachers who think they know everything, and don't want to hear anything from students? This is the worst thing you can do, because you don't let anybody share. I'd raise my hand and would automatically be ignored.

I relate to Charlotte's negotiation of roles, yet from a completely different background. My own current as well as past role greatly complicated my student experience. My role as a mother had undergone a shift, "[My] biggest challenge was having been a traditional mother and wife. My family had been my foremost priority, and now my priority became me, for the first time." After 25 years, my identity was beginning to include my own interests, and this was a mental and emotionally challenging transition. I found I carried my mother identity into the university space, struggling to manage my new identity as a student:

This was not an easy change...When they [my sons] visited or returned for any extended time, our family routines conjured me to return to the rhythms of my mothering role, despite the fact I had assignments and projects to do" This struggle continued to affect me at school, feeling visible as a mom figure to some of my classmates, a reminder that I continued to wrestle with my conflicting roles at home and at school.

My enduring role as mother, wife, and daughter of now an elderly parent, also affected my perspectives and choices:

I experienced resentment and misunderstanding at times. I had day-to-day responsibilities that younger students did not have to be concerned with because I was sandwiched between my private and public worlds, at times caring for my aging mother and caring for my grown sons. Most of my peers were concerned about getting out of school and starting life. They were fearless with fresh ideas, and had more self-esteem.

Managing my responsibilities as mother, wife, and daughter, was combined with a lack confidence in my ability to adequately perform in university, compounding my stress as, “I felt I required much more time to read and do assignments than the time given, and I struggled with the belief that being older, I should do well, if not better, than younger students” This belief created a conflict in my identity as a mature adult student, in ways akin to Rob, Rosemary and Charlotte.

**Subtheme: Support and lack of support.** The third subtheme of relationship is defined as the “assistance or help”, “approval”, or “provision of interest” and “encouragement” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2016). Support, as well as the lack of, surfaced as a recurring relational aspect, whether from family, peers, instructors, or professional affiliates, affecting the older adult student’s experience in returning to university.

Rob addressed the issue of support, saying, “I don’t get a ton of support, but I don’t get a ton of lack of support.” His goes on to clarify his comment, through his storied encounters within and outside university. He expressed frustration with the course registration, specifically for required classes that are often unavailable. He stated, “Schools must continue to change. Universities have to realize time is valuable for the mature student.” Referencing the many roles and responsibilities of the mature learner, Rob viewed a lack of support in the structure of the institution: “You have to

realize that I don't have the same responsibilities in terms of school. I know I don't get an extra 'handicap' mark just because I'm busy, but they could work with my schedule." Despite this of lack of care and concern within the institution, Rob reveals an underlying source of strength: his personal faith. In his journal, written in the start of his second term, he stated, "I know I can succeed, even though God has known it all along. I am nervous and excited at the same time. I know this is where I am supposed to be." This overarching belief is a strong foundation of support to which he often refers. From this stance, he objectively expressed his reality as an older adult student, "the hardest thing is that I don't have a support group...Support. As mature students, we don't have that... It's just a totally different world." Rob's support as an older student, full-time businessman, husband and father, is clear; he does not have the supportive inclusion privileged by younger students. "It's like you are, in a lot of ways, an island. Everyone shakes my hand, likes my laugh, but if I fail, I fail on my own. I do need help." Yet he often referred to the fact that he felt supported by "a strong sense of community within the circle of students I am in." His daily connection with particular students creates a helpful sense community. As well, he regarded his professional associates with admirable understanding, yet reveals a lack personal congenial support.

People who work for me, or my bosses, we don't talk about school. So, there's no support. They support me as much as giving me a pay cut, and allowing me to work and go to school, which is what I signed up for. That's fine. That's fair.

Rob was sure to note one friend who provided valuable encouragement to Rob in his return to university, "My friend went back to school around five years ago, and he's eight years older than me. He's a mentor. He was very successful, and he just left it all. He knows. He understands and is an inspiration." Finally, Rob's greatest support comes from his family, most of all from his wife, "My wife's sees everything, and very

supportive. But, like everything, it's a challenge...My children support me as much as they can support me. Then again, when it gets in their way, it's a different story. And I understand!"

Rosemary's part-time experience of university reveals a support wherein she was able to work and pay for her education and also enjoy her "love for education." "That's what's kept me going all along. Everything that I got when I attended class, was very rewarding for me, and for tomorrow, and the next day. I'm very happy about education." Her impetus for learning supports her continual perspective. She appreciated her experience, while part-time studies supported her preference and process of learning:

Adults don't have to have the end result or solution right away. I find that my son and this generation are very impatient. They want things right away, whatever it might be. Many mature learners are much more willing to work over a longer period. I think they are more content and interested in the process. It's a slower arrival at destination...I think I would still choose to go part-time, because taking a studio class, you really want to give it all of your focus. And art education practicum really eats up your time because I like to prepare as much as I can. I do a lot of planning, examples, so yeah, it takes a lot of time. So I think, still, I would choose part-time only.

Yet, part-time studies meant taking night classes, and this was not conducive, nor supportive to living outside of Montreal:

As a mature student, my days were long. Being in the part-time program, we were always the last ones to register; therefore, I was always in night school. I'm glad those days are over for night school, I really am. I was late coming from the West Island... I found some of the



drawing classes hard when we had to stand in front of a piece of newsprint for four hours. Doing this at the end of the day was a challenge.

Also, working during the day and coming into school at night prevented her from accessing certain support services, introducing another layer of complexity and challenge for mature learners:

[A]s far library support, research support, technical support, or any of those kinds of services, the problem was that I was always a part-time student, coming in the evening, while these people weren't even around. They were gone for the day.

Yet in order to actualize and achieve her educational and career goals, Rosemary's family accommodated Rosemary's need for a studio space in her home, when the university studio facilities proved less than helpful:

I really didn't like working downtown in the spaces that were given to us. They were crowded, and to bring all your paraphernalia along and to try and create a workspace, I found that it was hugely challenging. So in the first few years I did most of my work at home... I would set up my stuff in my dining room on a Sunday and work all day...I had to interrupt my family's environment to do my art work for school.

As seen, a mature learner's need of support, approval, acceptance, and encouragement take different forms, and Charlotte's need for support in her return to university at an older age invites further considerations of the mature adult student. She encountered a lack of support in the classroom for her concerns, participation, and so learning was effectively truncated:

I felt I had much to offer in the teaching program, but was questioned on

everything....There was a blatant favoritism for those who adhere to the taught teaching and philosophy in the university classroom. And if it's just wanting the grade, then there is something wrong; that's not constructive learning.

The demonstrated insensitivity and disrespect from some professors, in turn, breaks down potentially supportive relationships with younger students. As a result, Charlotte often suffered a lack of peer support, "Often, mature students were disrespected by younger students and teachers. There was a lot of ignorance, and a lot of arrogance. Sometimes students rolled their eyes at me." The lack of support from professors and also peers created unsupportive social relationships. This occurrence clearly demonstrates how the mature student and teacher relationship is vital in creating an encouraging or discouraging learning experience for the mature learner. In contrast, one professor is specifically noted, and provides further understanding of ways the mature student realizes support, "One teacher in particular, a prof in my 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year, was always interested in my input, let me talk, ask me questions, and involve me." Herein, the professor's respect and appreciation of mature student create an empathetic learning environment where diversity is valued.

My experience returning to university began with a lack of confidence in my abilities as a student, yet like Charlotte, I too needed supportive recognition and understanding for learning and self-actualization. I feared I had nothing to contribute. I needed "to learn." Taking classes with my husband was a form of support while I learned to develop new skills and gain realization of my own capabilities, "I only registered for classes that my husband was in. Our togetherness was the bridge I needed to find my way." I looked for a school counselor and advisor. I found one, who was a woman close to my age. We met once a month throughout my first year. She was crucial source of encouragement at this time. I made no mention of her in my story,

yet in the witness of Rob's, Rosemary's, and Charlotte's experiences, I again remembered her and her supportive counsel during this liminal period of adjustment, learning, and becoming a person in my own right. This counselor's compassionate understanding and university expertise enabled me to rise above self-doubt and manage the stress in my academic challenge. Her vulnerable humanity was a major source of care and support that I needed. My story would have been much different without her. This insight raises questions about the formal supports that are in place for mature students, and if the experiences of others could have been reshaped had they benefited from such support as I did.

### **Theme: Values**

The second major theme that emerged in this study concerns values. A value, as defined in Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, is "something (as a principle or quality) intrinsically valuable or desirable." The values of Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte significantly impact their student experience, being overarching influences to the ways they navigate, respond and perceive their university experience. Their values emerge as underlying principles that guide their journeys and so effect judgments and attitudes and decisions throughout their experience as mature learners. These existential qualities include meaning of success, making a difference, and living authenticity.

**Subtheme: Success, mindfulness, overcoming limits.** The mature learner's value of success is a subtheme that is articulated over and over, inviting further consideration of the importance of feeling successful in the learning journey, regardless of age. Success, as defined by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2016) is "the correct or desired result of an attempt; the attainment of wealth, favor, or eminence". Rob, Rosemary and Charlotte shared experiences that portray successes found through attempts, achievement, or processes that value an inner reward, and I focus on this

aspect as a key interpretation of this study. Their stories reveal a mindfulness, or a living in the moment. They reflect on, and savor what is being learned. Merriam-Webster (2016) defines mindful as “aware of something that may be important; inclined to be aware.” Herein, the mature learners transcend limitations for success that conveys integral values. Through deep reflection and appreciation of process, the mature adult student’s focus is on constructing deeper meaning, not only on achieving academic grades, but seeking a more extended, thoughtful learning. Within this deliberation, they gained new and developing perspectives on the notion of values that guide their learning expectations.

Rob’s university experience reveals a passionate value for process. Rather than only a means to a diploma, each class is examined against a backdrop of being and becoming. He articulates this mindful consideration for the university experience: “There is always process, and that’s really why I’m doing it, regardless of the outcome.” His learning process and experience extends to daily life, for meaningful outcomes, and he related this to his art education course in particular. Art Education was a space that proved especially prolific for Rob in this regard, as his art course was a means to further self-discovery, exploration, and reflection through his mindful integration of its processes, and demonstrate his meaning of success:

The art class was quite a bit to take in, and a lot to begin to overcome ...Entering my last art class that term, I remembered the fear and trepidation I felt the first week of the course... the first class we were asked only one thing: to stare at the other person and draw. I didn’t realize it then, but the playing field was being made equal. I was given a reason for it to not look as one would imagine a portrait should look. The freedom it brought! It was a revelation moment. For me, it was a success.

A transformative learning occurs as process comes into focus. Nascent opportunity for self-reflection is allowed, and for Rob, through the embodied practice of art, connections emerged that generated new perspectives:

I did not leave the course as I entered. Through art, I realized I can enjoy the process regardless of the outcome. I can draw outside the lines and rediscover...For so long, I had focused only on what it ended up looking like. I had missed the point. Art, like life, is a journey. Enjoy the ride. There is so much more to learn and discover. I am thankful for having my mind and eyes opened to this.

In addition, Rob's acute awareness procures an examination of long held beliefs as a learner. Transformation takes place as old patterns surface and are challenged. Rob's mindfulness is demonstrated when he confronted his crippling assumptions in his student journey:

What was left in my mind was that I fail at school. For 25 years I carried that. I had to break that in my first semester of university. But it was challenging...I remember talking to a professor who helped me see that I'm not a failure. Success is the pattern. Failure is not the pattern. Failure was the exception. But it was a hard, a hard shift to make....Old thought patterns are so very, very overwhelming. But, now I go into school and I don't assume I'll fail. In fact, I won't fail---I don't fail. I don't fail!

Rob's new appreciation for process led to an appropriation of learning that contributes toward meaning making. Herein is Rob's definition of success: "Success, I think, is application. If I can apply it somehow to my life, that's a key and I think I'm able to do this, due to maturity."

Rosemary's success emerges through her mindful appreciation of learning. Her love for learning leads to an actualization of her dream to return to university to earn a degree in Fine Arts, and a successful external and internal journey of process: "Women of a certain age feel the need for permission to do stuff like make art, and not just continue to just clean the house or do traditional female things!" After more than 20 years, and through a 10-year process, her "long held dream of many, many years" is achieved. Mindful of the inherent value in process, she demonstrates success in continued self-development throughout her story. Her grounded awareness of that which is meaningful to her is portrayed in her response to initial rejection of her application by the Fine Arts program:

There was this wonderful person who worked in the registrar's office. I took it upon myself to approach him directly. 'Look, I've been rejected, but I don't feel that you have really considered what I have to offer here'...Later on, I burned my letter of rejection! I burned it as a ceremonial type of saying goodbye to the rejection.

Her 10-year process reveals her determination to succeed despite wearisome circumstances when she applied. She endured a "difficult" commute to university, a commute that at times "could be a good 2 hours each way, depending if it was a stormy night in the winter. Then, you come home at midnight after classes that could go to 10:30 at night." She bore the long commutes for 10 years to fulfill this dream. Difficult processes are forged, as she is mindful of what is most important: learning. She stated, "the one thing I live for, to learn something new, try it out, check it out." With keen awareness, she observed the university classroom from a position of both teacher and learner. Rosemary integrated a learning perspective that enhanced her current and future role as an art educator. "I think a lot about what I can use to teach my students. My teaching is influenced by my own learning preference" Again, Rosemary's

constructive awareness expands her teacher education process, “That’s what’s kept me going all along. Everything that I got when I attended class was very rewarding for me, and for tomorrow, and the next day. I’m very happy about education.”

Charlotte’s university experience conveys a more critical mindfulness than Rob and Rosemary’s. She returns to university as a teacher with strong established educational values. What emerges is an undeniable and fervent value for teaching wherein human diversity is recognized, appreciated, and integrated. She becomes aware how university protocol, programing, philosophy, and practice, conflicts with her own values of teaching and learning where individual difference is a central focus. As a result, her experience included continual external and internal challenges. Embodying her beliefs, she continually questioned the mandates she had to fulfill as a pre-service teacher. She was mindful of the disconnection she observes and experiences, and responded: “If I cannot connect, I’m not going to study any more than I have to. Charlotte’s deeply mindful self-reflection provides a way of seeing of what is missing yet important; she is zealous in her efforts for change, “Teachers must adapt and not just say, ‘This is the way you learn and how it is going to go!’ No! There are other ways of learning.” Within an educational system at university she cannot condone, she ardently advocates for divergent, new ways of learning and teaching. As strong convictions continued to be vocalized and acted upon, fierce resistance ensued. The implications of her efforts further validate her position of feeling increasingly against the institutional framework:

Just look at what we value now? Conformity, no thinking, and keep to the rules, to keep people in-line, make money, and to keep the system going, and we climb this little pre-made ladder...What about commitment to good education? Do you have to suck up to higher authorities to get opportunities? Why do we have to adhere to this bullshit?

Charlotte values a teaching and learning that is mindful of the needs of all students, therefore the needs and recognition of marginalized untraditional students. Her own experience becomes her living example. Her deep values sustain her convictions, and despite limitations and frustrated outcomes, success as process remains fundamental to her experience.

My experience is also shaped out of an impassioned value for continued growth, challenge, and meaning making, as reflected in the stories of Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte. Before returning to university, it was apparent that my role was beginning to change. As my children were venturing into new worlds of opportunity, I too, had a need for a new way of being, to explore and discover, for a continued becoming. My return to university was an unbelievable beginning. The opportunity was worth the “loss” of many familiar securities. My husband and I “moved to an apartment to attend university in Montreal, sold our car, and took a bus or the metro to school—a far cry from small rural towns where we had spent most of our years. I encountered a new world.” This new world required confrontation of fears, of personal insecurities, in exchange for self-determination, self-actualization, and new found self-confidence to trust myself and my judgments. Many times my growth and learning felt “...truly frightening. I felt like such an anomaly” in the academic landscape. I was mindful of the challenges of each day, class, and assignment, while also “interested, fascinated by, and cherished that which was new and enlightening. It was a privileged space for me.” The process was grueling but delightful, as I was becoming a teacher for an unforeseen outcome. Closing a former chapter in my life allowed for an opening of another for new meanings and discoveries. In its unfolding process “I knew I was beginning to think differently. During this time, the process fed my soul with meaning and on the difficult days, I reminded myself that education was also a means of personal fulfillment.” Herein was my success.



**Subtheme: Making a difference.** Emerging clearly in experiences of Rob, Rosemary and Charlotte is their desire for meaningful purpose and difference in a career as a teacher. A sense of generativity, privileged with age, and so meaningful contribution toward life and society surface in their responses, choices, actions, and professed goals. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary's definition of purpose is, "the reason why something is done or used" or "the aim or goal of a person: what a person is trying to do, become" (2016). Purpose becomes integral to their academic journey.

Rob's purpose in returning to education to be an elementary school teacher, forefronts a larger purpose: to live a life that is "beyond his wildest dreams." His process of education is a means wherein he exercises this goal:

Someday this will be a memory, and my life will be but a story I am telling. It is hard not to be simply anxious to arrive at the destination, but that is not what it is about. It started as a journey and will continue as one as long as I have breath.

His student process demonstrates living with purpose, wherein he can "do something that seemed out of reach, out of the norm, or seemingly beyond what I've ever dreamed possible." He explains this purpose in light of being a teacher:

I mean, for the future, there are a lot of interesting opportunities. I'd like to earn a living in this, but I don't need to earn a fantastic living. But, to make a difference is important. I will see where it goes from there. I don't know if I will necessarily settle into one thing and just ride out into the sunset. I don't know if that's necessary.

Making a difference in life, whether as a teacher or a student, is actively demonstrated in his experience. Returning to higher education is an opportunity to live this aim, just

as becoming a teacher will be, transcending his concern for money. Rob shares a freedom in pursuing new opportunities and possibilities in his future, stating, “If I believe that there’s a purpose to this, then I’m not concerned.” He reflects a belief that living with purpose today precludes a level of concern for tomorrow, despite the exhorted external pressure from society. Overall, in the endeavor and position as a teacher, faith in his overarching purpose is supported.

Rosemary also found purpose in learning, and specifically, learning as an artist-teacher:

I knew I wanted a career change at some point, so it was a goal to teach part-time. But after a certain point at university, I figured this would be my job. I like the art world. I like the creative aspect to it. So it hits all bases. You can surround yourself with beauty and have power of doing that. You can change your world. Art is very powerful!

Upon finishing her degree, she stated, “I feel recognized, more aware of who I am.” Yet continual learning as well as teaching, is where she finds purpose. Rather than using her last credits for an independent painting course, she chooses to complete a minor in art education. Through thoughtful reflection she decided another painting course is not what she wanted:

This was something that I just didn’t want to pursue anymore. I wanted still more, I don’t know. Not to be sheltered, but more direction at that point. I really didn’t feel as though my three paintings were going to be it for me.

Through art education, she realizes her desire to be a teacher of what she loves to learn. As a mature learner, Rosemary is guided by her desire to learn and create art, yet in the

process, recognizes teaching art provides “still more.” As with Rob, Rosemary’s purpose involves a recognition and generativity through making a difference in the lives of others. For Rosemary, purpose is found in helping others learn, and so contributing to other’s development to be an artist.

Rosemary’s desire for teaching is akin to Charlotte’s, yet Charlotte sought public teacher certification to teach in the public school system: “The only reason I’m sitting here is because I need this goddamn certificate, so I can continue what I’ve been doing –what I love!” But her intentions become frustrated by the demands of the pre-service teacher specialization program where her philosophy is in conflict. Rather than enhancing her learning, as she moved through the program, her extensive work experience as a teacher prior to entering the certification program was at the heart of many of her conflicting moments. She endeavored to make a difference in teacher training, and offered a strong voice for reflective change, empowered by her teacher and life experience. She continually reported feeling ignored and that efforts were made to silence her; in response, her resistance was bolstered:

I am a teacher and there is an obligation when you become a teacher. This is what I realize in my ‘old age.’ I want to have a purposeful profession. I want meaning in that. This education is a lot of money and comes with an obligation to serve students in their best interest. If I cannot do that, I have no business being a teacher. If I cannot promise myself I can do the job, then I better stay away from it. That’s what made me think I could never adhere to the MELS program. They would kick me out! I admit I am a total anarchist when it comes to education. I’m not throwing bombs, but my opinion.

Though her confrontational efforts did not incite a desired program change, self-understanding and awareness led to her own internal changes. By the end of the program

she felt she might best be suited to teach outside of public school system, without compromising her teaching ideals:

I realized I don't want to teach art within the school system. I'd rather be a Community Art Teacher and have fun, and give this fun to the kids, while they are expanding their knowledge about the world. Art is essential. It brings people together. It's a mirror of our times, reflecting what is going on, and makes us think.

It is here she finds recognition in life and society, forwarding a more inclusive way of learning and her belief "...in an education approach where students learn about life and so go out into the real world."

The underlying purposes conveyed through the experiences of Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte resonate with my own desired purpose to make a difference in the lives of others. Coming to university, I was driven by a hope that I could learn and develop new ways to contribute to society, desiring to live what life I had left in a way that would continue to generate a purpose and meaning. Upon returning to university, "I was in a liminal space wherein my passion for meaning had not ended, but needed expanding. I had a desire to grow and learn and find my place in society, and therein contribute in new ways." I wanted my children to know that change is an exciting, crucial part of life, and fears can be overcome. And "with my children now out of the house, at least most of the time, I felt an inner hunger to grow, to learn new skills, and to contribute to others in new ways." To continue to learn from others, yet help others, was vital to me in making the decision to return to university.

**Subtheme: Authenticity.** As defined by Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (2016), authenticity speaks to a value for what is "real or genuine, correct, true and accurate." This is demonstrated in Rob's, Rosemary's and Charlotte's adherence to that

which they consider “worthy of acceptance or belief” and involved a “conforming to” what is true and “essential” (2016). The mature adult student demonstrates truthfulness in living out their ideals, beliefs, and sense of personal responsibility as a worldview, in relation to learning and the program of study. This is revealed in multiple admissions of frustration, joy, and meaningful interrogation of, and effort to, confront falsehood, and the rewards that they experience. They each seek to correct what is unjust or seemingly fruitless in their university experience to become a teacher. Forms of curriculum and delivery are critiqued, valued, and confronted. In the university setting, their authenticity is the heart of how they articulated what was missing from the learning experience, resulting in generative conversations for imagining the potential future university programming and delivery for the mature learner.

Rob’s authenticity in the role of learner is revealed in his vulnerability and need to affirm his capabilities when he shared an incident from early on in the program:

Once I asked my Psychology teacher a question. She’s very smart. She looked at me like, “How can you be so stupid?” That’s what it felt like. I was to write a paper and include a certain concept, but I didn’t understand the term. She looked at me like, “How can you not know?” And I had no idea. I said, “Trust me, I need your help right now, but I will be able to succeed on my own and move further away.” That is actually ‘The Zone of Proximal Development,’ or something like that, which means: ‘I need your help right now. You are the expert. I’m going to stay close to you. You’ll teach me. Then I’ll move away, and I’ll do it by myself.’ A lot of people learn that way. I just needed to understand.

Rob’s desire to truly achieve a state of understanding reflects aspects of a transformational learning process was already underway when he entered university. In

speaking for changes against a seemingly faulty way of marking, Rob also revealed his sense of authenticity extends to evaluation and assessment:

I would also change the marking system. Whatever mark you get that would be your exact mark; not an 89.7% or a 90.1%. You are fighting for and earning every mark you get, and then they just remove 5% from you with no justification? There's no reason. The GPA absolutely makes no sense! It's frustrating too, because I have no idea what I get on my final exams. It's worth something! I know what mark I got for the course, but I don't know if they are honest with me. Do they push your grade up or down depending on having too many high marks? That happens!

Authenticity also emerges as a strong value in Rosemary's university experience. Her return to education after dropping her initial pursuit of learning 15 years earlier meant she was living out what she believed to be right. She was reconciling her inner needs and beliefs with her external actions in the world. She continued to display a genuine integrity for what she values in her life, a dedication to the profession she wished to enter.

If you think you are going to go out and teach, how are you going to incite an excitement about learning if you, as a student, aren't excited about your own learning i.e.: have your class work done? I mean that's ridiculous!

She exhibited genuine concern on course delivery in light of the reality of learning: "The readings are a dry, dry thing. To add something would help. Oh, and half the time, we didn't even talk about an article. Why bother assigning it? These are the teachers of

tomorrow!” Rosemary’s authentic regard for learning includes a practical assessment of a mature learner:

Mature students contribute to a university classroom. They are equipped with a worldview and have experience and information, so they put things into context quickly, based on just things taken in over the years. I think that’s good, because then they can move on to what it is that they are supposed to be doing.

By extension, she stressed the need for more authentic practice in the university classroom, seeking ways to achieve high levels of excellence over the performance of learning in the classroom. In this way, Rosemary embraced her own vulnerability to make mistakes as a way to learn, and recognized that this is not necessarily a state that more insecure students might be willing to risk:

In the Art Education setting, where a series of presentations are done, every student could be filmed for a few minutes, and then critique themselves. They would see the technical and theory personified. You could give people the option to take part or not. I definitely would have been interested in having myself videotaped.

Charlotte’s authenticity was profoundly reinforced in her story, in the ways she continually positioned herself as against the institutional protocols and practices. She frequently illuminated what she viewed as detrimental in her experience, a sense of injustice that she took to heart. In light of the program adherence to narrow, inflexible teaching styles, she appropriates responsibility for change, stating honestly:

I don’t know how to explain it, but it frustrates me to no end that a person thinks just because you have an academic achievement, they know everything. When you aren’t listening, you actually potentially

hinder students to learn something valuable from a person that has been there... I'm 52 years old. I'm not an idiot! I've been doing this for 17 years. Couldn't you just listen to me?

Steered by genuine conviction, she faced conflict in what she believed was true, accurate, and correct from a strong conviction rooted in her views of what mattered most when teaching children. She remained true to what she believed despite severe and punitive outcomes:

Coming to university I thought was the best way to continue my career. I love teaching. I did finish my degree, but the university education is in conflict with my teaching philosophy. I didn't expect this... When I came to university and saw all ... that went on, I thought, 'It's not my philosophy. This is not where I can be useful.'

Reflecting on my experience in returning to university, I see a contrast in perspective for a difference from the experiences of Rob, Rosemary and Charlotte. Yet my hope and desire to learn was grounded in an authentic tenacity to do my best, and I approached my assignments with rigor. My meticulous desire to perform what was required, to do my best, had a prevailing impact on my experience, and many times contributed to an exhaustive anxiety: "I wanted to learn, and knew the satisfaction of doing my best, and I attached my worth and capability to my grades." Yet I suffered from my demanding, self-critical assessment of my performance. My genuine efforts required an exhaustive amount of time and energy, and "I was driven by perfectionism." As a result, "despite my good grades, I often cried in my first year, believing I could not write, have any opinion, nor form one, let alone complete an assignment with sufficient quality" Yet, with time:

This experience of returning to learning has challenged me to interrogate what I had believed, what I do believe, and what I hoped for,



or more simply, what I had learned, accepted and rejected in the course of coming to know.

In the process, I have come to understand myself, and gained a realization of ability, for an authentic view of myself in learning and teaching:

I have been humbled and surprised by my own potential and the possibilities of learning. I have learned over the last years that my work reflects a distinct quality, because I do care deeply about learning and contributing to a new world of my making in art education.

As a result, “I [...] continue to learn from the world I have had” for ongoing application toward my future goal of being a mature adult teacher, and I have “had to keep walking, trusting, and working. Hard.” My learning process continues to be worthwhile, and I persevere to embrace new challenges that come with being a mature adult student. Though I continue to do well, and achieve high grades, I have come to learn that my worth is not found in these products of learning, but in something greater: a humble realization that I have unique potentialities for a greater, collective good.

### **Theme: Challenges**

The stories of Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte, and myself reveal many of the challenges encountered when returning to learning. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines challenge as, “a stimulating task or problem” (2016). Challenge is also defined as “a calling to account or into question, an action, statement... that is against something” (2016). Both definitions are descriptive of some of the peculiarities of being an older adult student. Their stories further illustrate specific challenges in their late in life return to become teachers. In this regard, the subthemes of learning how to learn, unacknowledged life experience, and a perceived divide between praxis and theory

emerge for a greater empathetic understanding of the older adult student who has returned to university to become teacher.

**Subtheme: Learning to learning.** Returning to university for those who have been away for more than twenty years in some cases is understandably an adjustment. Scholarship requires new thinking and seeing, yet there is also another learning that mature learners discover: learning how to learn. Before diving into their studies, some older mature students find they need to learn new skills, tools, and even language. These tasks can be challenging, and may even be challenged by a mature student, even though this expands the mature learner's educational domain.

Sometimes with great humor, Rob relived his adjustment to the world of university. He remarked on his need to learn new terms and essential tools as fundamental for courses. He described his early experience: "So my first semester was insanely pathetic. I was just learning how to learn. I couldn't really focus on any schoolwork until I learned how to do school; what I had to do to do it. Like everything. Everything." The necessity of learning university protocols and expectations, such as learning how to study, research, use the library, the best ways to take notes, and to learn "just how to organize yourself" can be quite overwhelming and time consuming. Rob's descriptions were endearing, yet still revealed some of his initial shock at the unanticipated challenges of learning. For example, he shared:

This last week a kid said, "What the fuck is that?" And I said, "That should be my T-shirt!" Because for everything I do, I say that, "What the fuck?" I have no idea. My whole life is that right now. Like my first class, I ran in but I was in the wrong classroom because they switched my class and I had no idea how to have known that. Or, when a teacher said, "You know, I like Moodle." I thought, "Moodle? What is Moodle?" And, like you don't want to put up your hand. But people caught on a bit

with me, that these things were new to me.

Rob needed to learn the techniques of learning, yet he realized that this was not the same as intelligence and thinking through questions and issues:

I'm realizing now, I am smart. And I'm not any smarter necessarily today than I was last year. I have different knowledge. I've learned how to learn, but my core intelligence has not shifted. What I had going in, I have now... Or, maybe it's the fact that I'm understanding how to learn. The second semester was by far easier than the first, because I didn't spend the first month panicked.

In comparison, Rosemary's experience reveals some of obstacles that she had to negotiate before formal learning began:

So I applied, but I got rejected the first time because my portfolio didn't comply. I was working during the days when they offered portfolio-coaching sessions. I said, 'I'm not going to take this! I'm not going to take this!' And, uh, that was a shocker for me, because hey, I thought, my portfolio was okay. I had already exhibited some of what I submitted. But sure enough, it wasn't. 'Without Portfolio' remained on my transcript until I was accepted into the Art Education program. I did follow the guidelines this time. I came up with a very strong portfolio.

Learning to learn involved adapting to the seemingly illogical requirements or processes of the education program extended from the portfolio to the curriculum of courses:

I didn't come from CEGEP, when I returned to university; I had to do the first level Drawing and Painting classes...It was a bit of a shock for me, because these classes did not teach a traditional method of painting

and drawing. The professor's approach was of a conceptual nature, and not focused on getting the tools and skills training. I did adapt and it was okay.

Rosemary 'learns to learn' with a consistently reflective, holistic understanding as evidenced in her story, and her love of learning is defined by a critical yet balanced perspective of the pros and cons of what university had to offer.

Yet Charlotte, in view of her time limits and her teacher experience, held a different perspective on program expectations for learning. The program protocols were viewed from a utilitarian perspective, and found "ridiculous." She comments: "There was no room for other ideas! Exceptions were not considered, and no imagination. Only follow the rules." She was clear to iterate that being a mature adult, "our needs are different. We don't have our whole life to go do "this," and then "that" for a while" thus a conflict of interests. Learning to learn was met with resistance and in the end, did not prove to support Charlotte's goals, but instead contributed to greater frustration over the course of the program.

My initial return to university presented an extreme case of needing to learn how to learn. It was a shocking reality for me, and I struggled to believe I could "catch up" to what seemed so natural to the younger students around me: "The younger generation had already developed training...I was in an environment where younger people knew more than I did." I required skills I had not developed: "Basic skills needed to be learned, such as how to use technology, to speak up and ask questions in class, not a skill that was reinforced when I was last in school." As Rob found, learning practical technical skills was very time consuming. At times I became extremely frustrated, much like Charlotte, in having to devote great amounts of much time in learning, and re-learning, computer skills in order to complete assignments. Also, I needed to also learn to trust myself like Rosemary articulated, but in my case, "My sheltered, religious

background and the female roles modeled did not prepare me for the world outside the home, or one of independence.” These were fundamental skills I needed in order to learn. I had to learn to *unlearn* my initial belief “that being older, I should do well, if not better, than younger students.” I had to accept that I was a very new learner, even if older than my fellow colleagues.

**Subtheme: Unrecognized life experience.** Having extensive (and generational) life experience, often over 20 years of unique and personal life learning outside of post-secondary education, the mature learner has gained valuable perspectives and knowledge in conjunction with the theory and practice presented at university, a quality that younger students may not possess. Yet our stories consistently speak to the fact that this lived experience was for the most part unrecognized by teachers and students. Our insights were not invited for discussion, nor inquired about in any depth in the instructor-student exchange. This led to frustration and a sense of a lack of respect for lived experience, resulting in a perception among participants in this study of an inflexible, rigid adherence to, and time for, curricular mandates only. For example, Rob stated:

They could use mature students more in university, especially in classes. Give us a platform to express ourselves, because it is different. I mean, I agree and disagree that credits are credits and you have to earn them, but I look at the ridiculousness of registering for the course, “Communicating with Parents.” The lady in charge says, “No, you don’t have enough credits for that.” I think, “My word! I think I had three children!” They’ve gone through almost all elementary school and high school, you know? But I can’t take it. ... I mean I could give more to the classes I am in because I had life experiences. I view things differently, just as I benefit from those around me and there is more of them...We

don't try to understand who's sitting beside you, who has a whole lot of experience, lacks in a lot of things for sure, but in other things, a wealth of experience. Teachers don't have time for it, but it's unfortunate. There are opportunities that are missed. Only a handful of people have asked anything about my life, you know? And I'm not saying it's critical, but I just think it adds an insight; it adds a different level.

With many years of professional experience, Rob states how the institution is missing opportunities to gain valuable insights on student learning, procedures, and teaching:

If I was a director of the program, I would want to sit with me because I'd give an unfiltered, uncensored opinion and perspective on things. I'm not nervous about saying something, and maybe they didn't realize something they are doing doesn't make sense.

Rosemary also expressed a concern to contribute her professional experience as part of instruction and class dialogue. She articulated how "having some life experience in art education class was helpful. A mature learner has been exposed to so much in life already," but encounters little acknowledgement by the program. She declared, "Mature students see problems, especially if teaching is not effective" but this level of sensitivity was actually problematic if asserted in class conversations. She was aware of the "potential" in the classroom but she was mindful to abide with sensitive restraint, to avoid possibilities of "a power struggle certainly ... In most cases, mature learners are respectful of that, so therefore they don't exert themselves."

Yet in contrast, Charlotte spoke out fervently of her past experiences as a mother, teacher, and adult in the classroom, and how that impacted her university experience. She became increasingly disillusioned with the teaching profession and the university experience of learning where a practice of life learning was unacknowledged, and regarded as disruptive to planned curriculum and teaching protocols. "I started

teaching when 21 years old, and I'm still teaching. I always considered what came to me naturally, how I learn and how does the student learn," yet this experience proved a liability in the very program that should have embraced what she had to offer. Charlotte left the program convinced she was not respected and she was in fact, unwelcome.

In my experience, I often felt that my life away from education was unimportant to my early university years. At times I felt I was so behind, and "invisible", I too felt my past life was more of a detriment to my university experience, contributing in my case to an internal conflict of emotions. I felt that "being from another generation than my fellow students was a privilege" in light of what I had experienced as a mother and wife who had been sheltered from some societal pressure and concerns in keeping a job, and financial security. But in this, I did not know who I was in the university backdrop and felt "in other ways I was disadvantaged." I had so much to learn that seemed common knowledge for others. My life experience was not formally called upon in classes, yet it was a resource that inevitably shaped many of my perspectives of gaps and absences in myself. Yet, an opportunity to share my experience could have aided personal and collective learning, and looking back, I believe I would have felt greater reassurance and confidence had I been recognized in such ways.

**Subtheme: Theory and praxis.** Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines theory as "an idea or set of ideas that relate to a particular subject" or "abstract principles" in contrast to praxis, defined as the "practical application of a theory" (2016). The stories of the participants speak to both forms, yet they voice a perceived need for greater praxis within university curriculum and delivery. This is conveyed through a range of responses, from suggestions to annoyance, and at times anger toward the imbalance, raising questions for a pedagogical change more akin to andragogic qualities that consider the learner's needs, learning preference, life experience, and lifestyle.

Rob brushed up against the theory-praxis divide early on: “It’s an unfortunate pattern, because it’s a pattern based on regurgitation. If you’re strong in memory, you have probably, a 75% going in [to a course].” Active and participatory learning appears as lacking, and Rob emphasizes through his experience that the journey or process, rather than outcome or destination, needs to be a more central focus. “When I first entered the program, I wrote my philosophy of learning. It’s a cliché, but again, I viewed it as a journey. We have to focus on building the pathway in the bigger picture.” To Rob, education is learning practice, rather than a mere cognitive achievement. Dialogue, listening, contributing, helping, learning from others, and so a “socializing of thinking” becomes a needed and crucial aspect of learning. He thoughtfully stated:

The three goals of education are ‘qualification’ and ‘instruction,’ but the third goal, which is actually the first goal in the list, is ‘socialization.’ So somewhere along the line, we should be socializing. It means connecting. For what purpose? To create a better community, fit better into society, to be a more functioning, better, citizen. But, we are not learning from each other and we could learn so much. There should be a place for that. It’s understanding. But, we are not connecting. We would realize that we are all different. We would learn from each other. We could use each other in a positive way, so we all learn.

He acknowledges life experience is an asset: “Knowing the real world, the corporate world, what people expect and demand of you, just puts things in perspective maybe. It just brings life experience, period. You would relate to parents differently and understand what they are going through.” Rob believed a focus on process was missing as final outcomes are magnified. In turn, his art course became a place where a connection between theory and praxis was realized, and the cognitive, emotional,



mental, and spiritual meet. The process of art making provided for the integration of praxis and theory:

All the insecurities of being a child were brought to the surface. I have always considered myself to be creative, but have always made a very clear exception to that rule: art....The classes continued to be a journey deeper into the unknown, which, in many ways, is the known. It was new, while in other ways I found myself falling into assumed perspectives.

Herein an active integrative holistic learning process brings understanding beyond cognitive concepts, grounding Rob's sense of theory and practice, rather than theory or practice.

Rosemary reflected on art education as a means to advance her preference for holistic understanding in learning:

I like to be able to put art into a context in different ways – the historical, the materials, the process, what's behind it, the worldview, etcetera. Knowing this information adds to appreciation. To take in the Art History, take on the worldview of what's going on at that time, say around Matisse, and so understand where he drew his ideas from, adults relate to that.

Her holistic practice also included an appreciation for interactions with others:

Learning should be peer to peer, in many ways. If somebody in your classroom, and hopefully there is a few of them actually, has some teaching experience, build on that. Use their experience, invite them to reflect. You have to create a learning environment, and a lot of people aren't prepared for that. I think they should have more discussion about

that in the early classes. You know, maybe have a former student come in and talk about their experience. There is need of this support and instruction.

Rosemary advocates for ongoing interrogation of the effectiveness of practice as part of connecting to theory in the delivery of courses:

There's seems to be a lot of time spent on the peripherals, the theory or other aspects of teaching that are important, but the enactment, the performance, the relational, and the doing needs to be taught. Wouldn't it be revealing if professors had a video recording of themselves talking about readings, and the class is sitting there on iPhones, talking with their girlfriend, and not paying attention? I mean, what a revelation!

Furthermore, she called to a need for active learning: "There is a performance aspect to teaching, and that's something that nobody deals with really here in university." Her reflection on teacher training articulates extension beyond the prescribed delivery of information:

In preparing to pursue a career as an art teacher, you have to instill a love for learning and show that at every opportunity in the classroom. To always end with, 'This is only a starting point of what else is out there.' To leave the love for learning open ended, so that this could go on and on, is, I think, what has to happen.

Charlotte too called for more active, accommodating, living curriculum. In her view:

A teacher must not be afraid to take risks, and be a divergent thinker. If you aren't, my honest belief is you are in the wrong profession. Norms have to be set aside now and then, because everybody is different and

learns differently.

Charlotte ascribes praxis for active discovery that is necessary for effective learning. She believed this was consistently ignored in her university experience. She considers university as “backwards” in its process of training where prescribed curriculum ignores real life issues prevalent in the teaching performance, specifically student diversity. Instead she perceived an overemphasis on theory, specifically on lesson plans. She asserted that relationship had become secondary, resulting in a failure of holistic learning in the university classroom:

Instead, it was all about a lesson plan. What for? You come into a classroom, and you can take that lesson plan and shove it up your god knows what! Paper doesn't talk back, but students do. They might have other interests. If you don't get them interested in what you want, or only because you want them to, that's your first mistake. You need to have a student-based interest. That's how you capture them. From there they fly. Then make sure that there is a progression of learning. That is what you encourage and support in any way you can. When they get into a snag, it should be 'We are in this together.' It has to be a relationship.

In her avocations for teaching that included acute observance and focus on learners, and for a consideration of needs, Charlotte repeatedly called for a more holistic approach to learning that values humanity above rigid systems and conventions that she encountered in her university experience. She clarified further, emphasizing how art is a vehicle to achieve this kind of learning:

Like back to essential learning and what we need to know as humans, which make us human; to relate to our own feelings, to what is around

us. You can do that through art.

In frustration, she points out the irony, “The expected academics was taught, but that wasn’t my problem. There was no room for other ideas! Exceptions were not considered, and no imagination. Only follow the rules.” In addition, she strongly encouraged support for mature learners:

That’s what I learned: nothing is in place to prepare them for reality. I had the experience and knew my school’s policies. Yet, I was to teach (during my practicum with Special Needs students) as to regular kids. I was watched for a half hour, told I was wrong in my approach, and failed my practicum.

Despite years as a teacher already, Charlotte reported failing her practicum for not following the standardized approach to teaching that in her experience, was not appropriate for special needs students. At the same time, her professional experience did not make her receptive to feedback and this too was a point of contention. In response, she suggests the use of “IEPs (Individual Education Plan) for mature students” in an effort to offer a constructive solution that respects their unique needs, background, and life experience, and serves as recognition that maturity is an active asset in university classroom learning: “And, mature learners need to be respected and incorporated into the classroom. I think I’m a much better student now that I’m older, because I know a lot more.”

Encountering the experience of my fellow older adult learners, I realize how difference of background affects our perspectives and reflections of the university experience. Yet a common value for holistic learning emerged. I consider my experience, and cannot deny the outstanding teachers in my journey who took time to listen to me. Yet, I initiated time outside of class for a more personal interface with them

regarding my concerns. My intimate dialogue with a counselor provided invaluable support in my academic adjustment, and the foundation for relationship-building, which I believe contributed to my individual success and outcome at a time when adult learners my age were few.

### **Reflecting on themes**

The stories of mature learners in this study provide important insights and understandings of needed change in university programing and curriculum development and delivery that takes into account mature learners, yet also, the collective needs of all students. In this way, my expansive discussion in this chapter of my interpretations demonstrates grounded theory in action, that is, from deliberating on the form, content, and context of stories, theoretical implications emerged, which I believe are founded in holistic education learning and teaching theory, as well as the desire for transformational learning and teaching practices. From the themes that have emerged, it is my contention that consideration and understanding of the mature adult student's learning needs and preferences can aid and facilitate not only a smoother return and transition to the academic world, but enact a more empathetic education. Herein lies the foundation for a more holistic, relevant learning environment that will prepare teachers of all ages, within the ever-changing world, to be active agents of a transformational education. My next chapter considers the key concepts that emerged in a review of the themes and subthemes, and my final chapter addresses aspects of duality, ambiguity, knowledge, and power and so frame the educational significance of my research.

## Chapter 5

### Holistic Transformative Views

Informed by grounded theory, in this study the theory comes last, and my review of scholarship is in response to my interpretations of data, and the themes that emerged in the previous chapter. My review is “a rationale for this type of qualitative study through showing gaps or bias in existing knowledge” (Creswell 2013, p. 229) regarding understandings of the older adult learner’s experience of returning to university to become a teacher. Their return to learning marks a significant shift in social contexts in universities and more research is needed to investigate the university experience of third-age students, particularly for those becoming teachers. Based on my interpretations, my theoretical perspectives in this chapter focus on the value of, and need for, holistic and transformational education processes, not only methods, but foundational perspectives of learning. In this study, holistic and transformational education are bridged by life writing, that is, life writing functions with, in, and through both theoretical lenses and weaves together both dimensions. I chart life writing in holistic education, and life writing in transformative education, to demonstrate how sharing our stories operate as a means to bring theory and practice together. The representation and perspectives of holistic education and transformational learning and teaching provide for my exploration of existing scholarship, and align with the parameters of grounded theory in which the data generates interpretations, and the interpretations are then reviewed through literature, inverting the traditional model of qualitative research practice. By doing so, my study is emergent, and brings forward organic findings.

#### Holistic education

Emerging in the life writings of Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte, and my own

experiences, is a learning approach that reflects holistic education which is pertinent for theoretical discussion. We encompass a prolific view of learning, and display an embodied, connected, soulful practice where education becomes immediate and multidimensional, linked to meaning and purpose. In simple terms, learning intersects with life and propagates an education of meaning and purpose. This is seen in their stories as they acknowledge frustration with protocols that deny relationship and experience that forwards achievement rather than process, and so invites a need for new considerations that reflect a greater holistic view in learning.

London (2003) offers a profound entry point by stating “an inclusive...holistic pedagogy” is one “that is commensurate with ... an infinite web of interdependent elements,” (p. 304) as was revealed in my participants’ interpretations. The practice of holistic education as an “educational process that addresses all three constituent elements of that life: mind, body, and spirit” (pp. 303-304) and this was verified in the stories. For example, Charlotte displays an endeavor to integrate university requisites into her teaching practicum, yet with disastrous results as she considers her learners. Rob integrates his experience as a father, husband, and employee, toward learning for being and becoming and so teaching. Rosemary embodies her university learning for an expanded current and future art instruction. My own experience speaks to a sight of generativity, for an integration of lasting values in learning. London (2006) states:

“Teaching someone, anyone, as if they did not possess a mind or a body or contain spirit (i.e. core, ultimate values and beliefs) is not to teach the actual person standing right in front of one” (p. 8).

For London (2006) holistic education can be regarded as an “immodest ambition” that can: “provide an exquisite instrumentality for addressing the high and critical ambition of elevating behavior to the degree that the whole and integrated person appears, who is the necessary precursor to the whole and integrated society” (p. 9). I am immediately

reminded of the learning processes of Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte, as well as my own, as London's described "dynamic" holism, a state of being and becoming, a state of awareness in which learners become "actively engaged in creating their life moment by moment" (p. 8, 9). Our storied experience in learning evidences self-reflective contemplation toward an active and passionate concern for values and meaning. The integration of mind, body, and spirit is demonstrated, in a critical moment-by-moment examination of our academic process and procedure for meaning and purpose. The demonstrated holistic approach of education amplifies its primary foundation: learning is an integrated process, rather than "a result" (Hvolbek, 2013, p. 3). In the analysis of Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte and my own experience of university, theoretical components of holistic education emerge for an appreciation of education through a multifaceted learning process. As a result, a holistic approach to education is vitally relevant to my study.

Holistic education can be traced back to Aristotle's concept of "holism," or the perception that "the whole is more important than the sum of its parts" (Lawton, 2012, p. 168). Therefore, as Miller (2006) asserts, a holistic education is "an approach aimed at teaching the whole person...a desire to see the wholeness of the individual," therefore an education where we operate within a "curriculum of connections" (p. 101), and wherein the process of "connecting body and mind, integrating curricula, nurturing various forms of community, making connections to the earth and its processes, and finally connection in some way to the students' soul" becomes central (p. 101). Overall, a holistic approach is "integration and connection" where knowledge becomes "part of the student experience" (pp. 102-103). As Lawton (2012) describes, "holism understands knowledge as something that is constructed through the context in which a person lives" and "establishes the learners as interdependent with others and the environment" (p. 168). Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte and my experience exemplify an expansive awareness of learning connections for a continuous integrated development



of the whole being, and so a learning where values, relationships, and experience are in context.

Yet it is often this holistic stance that creates conflict in their experience. They confront an educational curriculum and systematic programming that lacks a holistic educational social paradigm. Procedural protocol dominates, and the sole characteristic of “reason” overshadows mindful “awareness” in the development of “intelligence” (London, 2006, p. 9). For example, Rosemary encounters student disconnection, and so a curriculum that bypasses student support, interests, and needs. Charlotte faces teachers who display a lack care and respect, and a disregard of experience. Capacities of the mind, such as imagining, intuiting, faith, dreaming, fantasizing, wonder, remembering, and awe were reportedly “underappreciated” in the art education classroom (p. 9). Sadly, we describe a general absence of, and general need for, holistic education in university, and point to inflexible teaching practices and curriculum, unrecognized student experience, teacher-student tensions, and narrow definitions of learning. Yet my own experience, as well as that of Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte, displays our fervent desire for, and appreciation of learning that calls for an “attending to a full and broad and deep and searching curricula and pedagogy...characteristic of holistic approaches to education” (p. 9).

Lawton (2012) argues that holistic education is composed of “four teaching strategies and approaches” that by extension, I believe are relevant to our older adult student learning experiences: 1) “transformative” learning through critical self-reflection; 2) integrated connection to life and living; 3) personal and collective meaning-making; and 4) local and global “community” awareness and responsibility (pp. 168-169). As I reflected on all our experiences, consideration and respect for these holistic aspects are integral to their position as learners and teachers. My research findings reveal prolific processes of personal “transformation” through our “connections to curriculum” for “meaningfulness” within the larger “community” (p. 169). For example, Rosemary is

continually attentive to how her learning and the teaching practice in the classroom can translate to her own teaching practices for improvement. Rob's constant reflections consider his own life experience as a father and businessman, and how it will contribute to teaching and the lives of his students. Many years of life, prior to university, provide in each case for a holistic, expansive view for learning. The experience of university education reveals our endeavor to connect learning to our daily living with family, job, peers, and process, resulting in a "moment by moment" appreciation of learning. This was especially evident in Rob's and Rosemary's story. A conscientious desire to make sense of what we learn in our university journey, for a personal and collective purpose, becomes our priority as mature learners. Having lived close to a half of a century or more, we often see with different eyes than our younger fellow students.

As older mature adult students, a holistic educational framework affords a relevant approach to learning that promotes interconnected and inclusive perspectives and processes that invite multi-dimensional aspects of learning, a development of personal and collective meaning, an integration of experience, and an appreciation of diversity. Herein, our life experiences enables a multiplicity of perspectives for learning. As our storied experiences express a holistic perspective, our experience is also an often frustrating one. Further examination and exploration of relationships in learning confirms learning is not a mere autonomous achievement, but a process that is deeply affected, enhanced, or hindered by others—teachers and fellow students. Through unpacking notions of holistic learning in terms of classroom dynamics, we note that in Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte's and my stories, we are taught by younger professors, often doctoral students, as well as professors our own age, which can be a source of tension. Charlotte's experience is a blatant example. This potential is directly addressed by Rosemary, and inferred in my own and Rob's experiences. Our stories speak to the great impact of relationships within a learning environment, and power dynamics that can emerge as fundamental concerns, such as Charlotte experience where she

encounters teacher condescension that arouses rage and resistance and affects the classroom. Citing this concern, a holistic educational paradigm presents a pertinent antidote, offering a turn from traditional institutionalization of the hierarchy of power to an equalizing of power based on respect and understanding. A holistic paradigm, valuing interconnection and interdependence in learning, forwards a mutual dialogic interaction in which teacher and student connect for a generative, living, relational integration of education and knowledge exchange.

Overall, the university experiences of Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte and my own experience unfold a living process of being and becoming. The aesthetic form of life writing allows for a rich multiplicity of perspectives for consideration. In this, my own, and my participant's experiences, become learning stories. As Mendal (2015) states, "experience includes not only actual happenings, but also our feelings, beliefs, issues, hopes, fears – all the things that make up who we are as humans" (p. 72). Our stories offer a framed reference that permits a personal, as well as a transpersonal understanding of "the individual life that is embedded in the life of the community" (p. 30). The display of multiple roles such as mother, father, spouse, for some, employee, results in multiple identities, and invites interpretation and reinterpretation; the storied "images of reality" provide for "imaginative possibilities and visions of change" (p. 30) as the multi-dimensions of *being* in learning become accessible.

An advocate for holistic education, Campbell (2012) illuminates holistic teaching "aims to connect learning and daily life while engaging all dimensions of human awareness and action" (p. 76). This grand assertion is demonstrated in my own university experience, as well as Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte's. Our learning intersects with daily life, incurring a perceptive awareness and action and attendance to an array of "physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual" dimensions (p. 156). Rob's critical awareness is demonstrated as he considers his deep faith, the lives of his family, or students around him. Discernment emerges as family and work concerns intersect

with university demands. Charlotte's financial concerns, her son's well-being, or her current teaching position incurs a deep awareness within her learning experience. Moment-by-moment presence becomes further cultivated and necessary for a demonstration of responsive consciousness nurtured through self-reflection, incorporation of values, and an enduring regard for meaning-making. Therefore multiple internal and external dimensions of the self are recognized, and our reflections on identity, beliefs, and values emerge as family roles and relationships require interruption, and for Rob and Charlotte, job positions become threatened and challenged. Our past experience and present learning create new vision within an embodied, integrated learning process that manifests a holistic philosophy where "everything in the universe is interconnected to everything else" (p. 76).

Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte's and my university learning experience also demonstrate Campbell's (2012) "*holism-as-critical-theory*" (p. 77) in our display of critical reflection of past and present paradigms for a making of new understandings. Rob realizes he does not fail and he does not have to color in the lines of previous assumptions. Rosemary discovers a greater confidence as she confronts rejection and discovers a new identity of being; Charlotte further realizes her philosophy of inclusion and learning against a backdrop of contrast. And I come to live out new ways of being. Though a responsiveness to the "wholeness of experience," our experiences demonstrate an essential holistic approach to learning (p. 77) wherein meaning emerges in context and experience and leads to personal and social transformation. Through the lens of holistic education, I map a theoretical foundation to my study as the older learner's experience offers a powerful view of learning that extends beyond the limit of the curricular content. Based on my interpretations, I propose that a holistic perspective is needed for a changing university landscape in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**Life writing in holistic education.** Life writing proves to be a vital tool for holistic learning, as it allows greater understanding of self in relation to others through its artful

expression. Multiple aspects of learning emerge through its process that invites a learner's authentic and personal engagement in the experience of others. The life writings of the experiences of Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte, and my own, reveal the struggle, heartache, joy and discoveries of being an older adult student, and therein transforms learning into human "being." The process and outcomes invite a seeing of others, and through a seeing through others, generates a greater self and collective understanding, and cultivation of empathy and connection.

Pinar and Irwin (2005) assert that life writing mirrors ancient traditional wisdom practices of storytelling for implicit yet holistic learning. The context of storied life writing allows for a kind of slipping through instruction for a greater personal gain of integrated, multiple perspectives, and meanings for learning. Rob's experience demonstrates the value of going beyond fears for a discovery of courage. Rosemary teaches the value of embracing the moment and the opportunities therein. Charlotte speaks to living one's conviction and to equality within diversity. And my experience reveals the grace found in humility, where confidence blooms. Through the heartfelt stories of older adults' return to university, I argue that humanity becomes individually articulated and shown within a context of everyday life. Readers engage with the mature older student on personal levels for a living, embodied relational experience essential to holistic learning. Through this relational intersection, the relived experience of older adult students permits a creative immediacy for understanding and being, for a more holistic integrated student and teacher development, a location in learning often neglected but vital.

Life writing also adds to the holistic paradigm that "link different parts of ourselves" (Miller, 2006, pp. 5, 6). Articulations of joy, pain, frustration, and discovery pronounce human values, needs, and desires, provoking an examination of who we have been and who we are, for a development of who we can be, want to be, and do not want to be as teachers. Relatedly, Williams, in conversation with Cole (1989), elaborates on the value of story, "Their stories, yours and mine---it is what we all carry

with us on this trip, we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them” (p. 30). Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte’s and my stories reveal the intimate “inner and outer realities” of our university experience (Palmer, 2007 p. 5). Critical aspects of learning and teaching seldom addressed in university classrooms are presented through the stories of participants. MacLeod (2011) further speaks to the power found in story: “Stories are not simply nice things to have; they are essential survival tools.” (p. 30). Our storied experiences articulate individual and collective realities of the learning and teaching context. And through story, the vitalities for student learning and teacher development emerge as participants vulnerably and candidly express our disappointments, fears, challenges, and accomplishments. Directly and indirectly, we share how their lived educational experience of learning as a returning older adult is at the heart of success as a student.

The expansive value of storied experiences is expressed by King (2008), who states: “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 14). King (2008) suggests the fact that stories have shaped who we were, who we are, and who we will be. Stories structure how we see the world, live our lives, and shape the stories of others. In this, Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte and my stories are in a way collective stories. We are becoming part of others’ stories, and will continue to intertwine with others for new stories. Our stories of what has been, form the reality of present experience, and in the same way, direct our future. Our stories are part of other stories, personally and professionally. Our story becomes family story, peer story, a story of supervisor and student, creating a ripple effect that reverberates when we tell our stories, creating an infinite continuous movement with no end point. In the interdependent “infinite web” (London, 2003, p. 304) of life becomes vital to the potential for learning and being. Life writing attends to an emotional literacy for connecting with others (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2010, p. 25). Through empathic encounters with older adult students, a wholeness of being emerges for an “embodied learning,” or what White (2014) purports is key to

meaning-making and potentially transformative experience in education (p. 25). White (2014) asserts that the “aesthetic experience is our original teacher” as the “body, mind, and spirit” are engaged to procure “subjective responses” for a knowing of self (p. 35). The artful aesthetic of life writing provides fertile ground for an empathetic examination toward a “rethinking of individual self” (Roenpapel, 2015, p. 46) and for an appropriation of conscious care and ethical living with others, despite difference, as reflected in Noddings’ (2005; 2006) ethic of care. In this way, life writing is deeply entwined with holistic learning, for a holistic examination of self is truly crucial for teacher development, because as Palmer (2007) so clearly states, “we teach who we are” (p. 2).

It is in this context that life writing and holistic education converge in my study. A holistic educational approach purports that the “intellect, emotion and spirit depend on one another for wholeness,” and “they become interwoven in the human self and in education at its best” (Palmer, 2007, p. 5). Storied life writing aids the personal and collective development of the “human heart”, which Palmer states is “the source of good teaching” (p. 4). The stories of the older adult students reveal much individual subjectivity that is moving toward an “awareness of interconnectedness” (Roenpapel, 2015, p. 45), as we witness in Charlotte’s teacher and student relationship wherein she feels demeaned and disregarded, or Rob’s articulation of being creepy to others in his class, being the only older adult male student, or my own experience of feeling inept, invisible, and with nothing to contribute to the classroom.

A holistic learning perspective extends theoretical perspective in order for the “the heart of the matter,” to emerge (Hasebe-Ludt, et al., 2010, p. 25). Through the storied experiences, “key factors affecting progress in both the academic and the social spheres” (Kaldi & Griffiths, 2013, p. 552) surface in “social reflection” (Leavy, 2013, p. 47), such as, Rob feels the pressure of breaking the stereotypes of the male “stable provider” who never changes careers, and therein experiences an isolation due to being misunderstood and considered as “crazy” by his peers. Rosemary speaks to finding

“confidence” and “permission” as a woman, “to do what we want to do,” such as a return to university at a later age. These are but a few examples that emerged through our stories and reveal the social constructs that affect mature learners. Through life writing, a resonance for “empathetic and heart-wise” (Chambers, et al., 2012 p. 370) learning is fostered, and the development of a relevant, spiritually attuned, holistic education provides the foundation for transformative learning.

### **Transformative Learning and Teaching**

Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte, and my own experience of returning to university speaks to an educational experience that extends beyond a mere accumulation of information, or transmission of a subject, to a meaningful process of change. Our return to university is prompted by a desire for change, and so education was a means to facilitate personal and cultural awakening for new purpose and meaning in our third age of life. We seek new understanding, for “a shift in the way we know” (Hart, 2001, p. 87) for a transformation in being and becoming. In this, an integration of learning involves deep understanding that aids a meaningful contribution to others in a career of teaching. As mature adult students, learning becomes a critical assessment of past and present experience. Rob’s experience, for example, demonstrated a reflective stance regarding past “failures” in school for new understanding of “success” where process becomes illuminated. He realizes a new awareness of self that has “always existed, but [was] never realized.” Charlotte critically reflects on her own learning style and current philosophies of university that reinforced a deepened passion for teaching. Rosemary’s educational experience demonstrates her serious critique of learning methodologies in which past and present learning come together for an expanded teaching practice. My own educational process brought examination of hindering patterns of belief for a revised sense of self. Paradigmatic shifts become evident, and our new experience of university displays a consideration of transformative learning in university education as



vital in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education. Learning becomes:

A process by which we transform our taken-for granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action (Mezirow & Associates, 2000, p. 27).

Richards (1973), insisted that “[c]hanging procedures and structures in education is not enough in itself; the person must be transformed...it is not the structure of an institution that makes the difference...but the values and behavior of persons” (p. 156). What she knew then, over 40 years ago, that this had been forgotten. Richard (1973) reminds us of what education should be, a process of transformation involving the whole person, teachers and students, within institutional structures. Yet, transformational learning does not seem to be the norm. After attending university for ten years on a part-time basis, Rosemary highlights the observation of a classroom with students who display a lack of presence and connection, for a seeming disregard toward instruction, fellow classmates, and teachers. She describes students who are busy on their laptops, texting on their cell phones, and uninterested in discussion. Charlotte points to an environment where a teacher’s disfavor is encountered, when curriculum is challenged, where grades are earned by conformity to the rules, and/or regurgitation of delivered information. Rob speaks to a lack of socialization in his experience, and that students do not really know who sits beside them, and there is little time, if any, given to learning from each other. Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte’s and my own experience reveal something wrong in education, and a change is required. But what kind of change?

Hart (2001) states that education has become “something to get through in order to reach the checkout with the grade or degree rather than being seen as a clearing for deep experience” (p. 3). Passionately, Hart (2001) states:

Contemporary education remains geared to downloading facts...and fostering compliance. We seek to shape a populace for the marketplace... against higher-order intellectual skills as well as the development of character... The result is a constriction of human consciousness. Without a deeper understanding of the place of information and the capacity of human nature...what we learn and teach best is how to shut down and fit in instead of waking up to life. (p. 4).

A “waking up to life” conjures visions of active, living awareness for an interactive learning with surroundings; engagement for an interactive community where dialogue is fostered. This depiction is, in many ways, illustrative of my own yearnings in my university experience, as well as Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte’s. We display a continuous, active, and passionate love of learning that survives multiple challenges for a process of continual personal transformation.

We each came to university to learn for different reasons, in slightly different programs, yet we all share a hope toward meaningful change in our lives. Rob returns to university with the intent to “live beyond” and become an elementary school teacher. Rosemary returns to school to satisfy her love for art and learning, to later choose a career as an art teacher. Charlotte returns to university advocating diversity and a desire to teach art to special needs children and discovers a new path. I return to university in hopes of finding more of who I am, with a goal of learning and contributing to a bigger world, to now completing a Master’s Degree. Findings demonstrate that our motivations deeply affected our learning processes and outcomes, and our experience certainly proves to be transformational. Relevantly, transformational learning and teaching becomes a pertinent theoretic outcome for my study. I refer to multiple scholars: Slavich & Zimbardo (2012), Meziro and Associates (2000), Meziro, Taylor and Associates (2009), Lawton (2012), Lawton and La Porte (2013), Greene (1997), Hart

(2007), Butterwick & Lawrence (2009), and Rautin & Ibrahim (2011), regarding theory leading to transformation in learning and teaching.

Lawton and La Porte (2013) remind us that “experience” or “event” is necessary for “transformative learning to occur” (p. 315). Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte’s and my own experiences reveal a process of learning involving reflective examination of our past and present experiences, and as adult education purports, their “depth and breadth of life experience...can be used as a resource for their and other’s learning” (p. 315). Integrating a lens of social constructivism, our lived and learning experiences contribute to a “larger view of education” for a powerful “disposition toward learning” for a greater “personal and collective potential” (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012, p. 576). Such perspectives extend beyond “right answers” and the accumulation of information. As “collaborative interdependence” is afforded in the classroom, the older adult student’s experience serves a “learning by doing with others” (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012, p. 583), inviting meaning and a continued “regeneration” (Hart, 2001, p. 6) of learning. Hart (2001) articulates transformational learning is an education “not just transmitted,” but an education that is “bringing about a change in one’s mind” for an “explicit development of human consciousness, character, and culture” (p. 6). Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte and I display this transformational intention in numerous ways, as we continually examined, reflected, expressed desire for dialogue, and explored practical application of theory. Rob realizes a need in the classroom for social connection and understanding among students. Rosemary reflects on specific ways to integrate student teaching practice in the classroom, for practical application of theory. Charlotte calls to a need for learning priorities where unique student needs are recognized. And, I relish opportunity for critical self-reflection for an expanded self-awareness. Our education demonstrates individualized transformative life experiences.

Our experiences forward the premise of adult education (Johnston, 2011), which also supports a transformative learning process where personal lived experiences and

reflection provide an event of “creating dynamic relationships between teachers, students, and a shared body of knowledge to promote student learning and personal growth” (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012, p. 569). Rob expresses a desire to connect with teachers and fellow students, for learning “opportunities that are often missed.” Charlotte’s efforts of connection with professors are generally met with resistance, and so transformational potential is unrealized as her experience was not recognized, and so, not respected. Transformational learning privileges vital interconnections between teacher and student. Boyd (2009) notes: “Transformative learning depends upon the instructor establishing genuine, meaningful relationships with students...both inside and outside the classroom” (p. 52). Yet the experience of Charlotte points out that this component towards a “crucial to transformative learning” (p. 52) is missing. Our stories reveal inherent tensions between lived experience and postsecondary learning that reveal important dimensions of teacher education often overlooked, dimensions vital to transformative learning and teaching. Incorporating the input and experiences of older adults would expand and allow challenging perspectives, beliefs, opinions and values, for a deeper, active understanding of teaching and learning. Supported by Slavich and Zimbardo (2012), student and teacher engagement in “collaborative, interdependent problem solving and discussion” is effective in “promoting positive learning-related attitudes, values and beliefs” for a transformative learning (p. 584).

Hart (2001) regards transformation as the fundamental outcome of education. He details its processes as movement beyond a “simple adaptation to the status quo” (p. 13) and a “consensus consciousness” (p. 65), to an active “way of knowing” (p. 65). Hart (2001) advocates a transformational education practice that invites a “moving into” (p. 1) a subject where “the heart of the discipline and our own hearts and minds are plumbed” (p. 172), in exchange for a “moving on” toward an accumulation of information, often characteristic of contemporary education (p. 172).

Hart’s (2001) “six interrelated layers” of knowing and learning for a “possibility of

transformation” (p. 2) are enlightening to my study, beginning with an initial interest, driven by emotion, relevance, and resonance for “information exchange” (p. 2). Second, experience united with information allows the development of knowledge (p. 2). Third, an interchange between teacher, student and subject offers an “opening into” a subject for analysis and intuition (p. 2). Fourth, “cultivating thinking rather than mandating what to think” (p. 8) leads to a development of intelligence. Charlotte demonstrates this thinking as she confronts what she considered inappropriate teaching regarding special needs methods over the course of the study. These viewpoints were products of continuous deliberation. In this way, she cultivated her own thinking, rather than taking on the mandated protocols of the program. Yet, intelligence alone, according to Hart, affords a self-serving, self-interest and control, and necessitates a turn “inward toward the heart” (p. 86). Hart’s fourth layer is then a “learning to see through the eye of the heart,” (p. 9) for “understanding,” that facilitates movement across boundaries that affords “connections, and closes the distance between self and other” (p. 87). Combined with experience, understanding nurtures wisdom, or “insight into what is true with an ethic of what is right” (p. 2), Hart’s fifth layer to transformative learning speaks to a “spiritual approach to education” involving “impulses of spirit: creation and communion” (p. 171) For example, in this study my own quest for learning becomes pertinent. My spiritual empathetic view of others births a richer, alive information exchange toward new understanding and realizations that I am not living life on my own, but I am part of a bigger mystery where we are all recipients, conduits, and participants for an ongoing collective creation. Hart asserts that this wisdom is the ultimate purpose of learning for the transformation of the human “being.”

Likewise, Taylor (2009) speaks to a transformational learning that declares the incorporation of equally significant interdependent “core elements”: experience, critical reflection, dialogue, holistic orientation, appreciation for context, and authentic relationships (p. 4). The foundation of “individual experience” becomes “the primary

medium of transformative learning” (Taylor, 2009, p. 5). Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte, and my own personal life experience provide andragogic openings for transformative learning in a number of ways, as we come from diverse backgrounds and experiences as people, spouses, and parents. Rob’s spiritual experience and values, as well as my own, invite existential considerations for learning and teaching. Yet the strict adherence to educational structures often prevents an integration of the spiritual within the classroom. Our stories of the university experience disclose the need for “reciprocity” within university classrooms (Creswell, 2013, p. 300) wherein symmetry of power and privilege is granted toward creating a transformative learning encounter. Our “wealth of knowledge and experience,” “broad range of interests and cognitive abilities,” and the “unique vantage point,” of mature adult students would provide “a wisdom acquired with age” (Lawton & La Porte, 2013, p. 310) for a potential facilitation of change. I have argued in this thesis that my participants and I have experience that can contribute to an education for change. Rosemary offers a wealth of knowledge regarding art, teaching, and learning. Rob offers a range of interests in working with children, and the world of business. Charlotte offers a vantage point for special needs and learning, I offer wisdom after raising three sons, and being committed in marriage for thirty-three years.

Additionally, transformative learning is a practice of education where students are then challenged to investigate their values and worldview, and become changed by the experience (Taylor, 2009). Questioning of assumptions and beliefs formed by past experience is then afforded through a critical reflection, a distinct aspect of adult learners (Taylor, 2009, p. 7) that is apparent in our storied experiences. Yet dialogue (Taylor, 2009, p. 9) with self and others is also a necessary aspect wherein experience and critical reflection converge. Dialogue within a caring environment provides a liminal space for exploration and examination of ideas and thoughts for an entry into knowing and meaning. A safe environment must then be afforded for this dialogical encounter, and so allowance for the awareness of attitudes and feelings that provoke insights and

understanding toward needed change (Taylor, 2009).

Furthermore, a transformational learning becomes a convergence that arouses holistic learning. A “holistic orientation” becomes an essential element to a transformational education experience. The “engagement with other ways of knowing—the affective and relational” becomes part of the learning cycle (Taylor, 2009, p. 10). A “see-feel-change sequence” where “feelings and emotions in the reflective process” rather than the “analyze-think-change” process proves effectual (p. 10). The interdependent processing of cognition and emotion, as demonstrated through the arts, allows for an experiential knowing. Rob’s experience speaks to this process, when he becomes engaged in the process of painting and clay. His art making involved action and thought that prepared a questioning of some long held assumptions in his case. He reflects on his assumptions of “staying inside the lines,” being concerned only with outcome and what something looked like. Instead, he realizes art is process, discovery, and self-expression. These realizations lead to a transformed perception on learning, on being, on living. The expressive activities of art making invited inquiry and exploration, for a “whole person learning” (p. 11). Taylor (2009) argues:

Expressive ways of knowing provide the means to evoke experiences for greater exploration, help learners become more aware of their feelings, and their relationship to sense making, and help concretize and experience, allowing the learner to reexperience the learning experience through expressive representation. (p. 11).

Here the art form of life writing becomes highlighted as it attends to an affective learning of reader and writer, through a re-living and a re-expression of another’s experience contributing toward a transformational learning.

As demonstrated in each of our experiences, transformational learning is enhanced or reduced, depending on “context” such as classroom, time restraints, an

environment of inclusiveness, prior experience, necessity, creative opportunity, and other contexts of empowerment or disempowerment (Taylor, 2009, p. 11). These factors contribute toward resistance to or disposition toward change. Charlotte's story of resistance poignantly illustrates the critical value of context, and its power to create or destroy a disposition toward change. When her teaching and life experience was unrecognized and her voice is silenced, incurring growing hostile defiance toward change occurs. Charlotte's story speaks to the explicit need for a caring, inclusive, "authentic relationships" (p. 13) between student and teacher for a positive transformational education. Consideration of experience, critical reflection, and genuine discourse points to a necessary learning-centred teaching approach in which the teacher takes the role of facilitator for a sharing of power, decision-making, evaluation, and other learning tasks. A dismantling of a hierarchy of power allays the fear of self-exploration for further student learning, and supports personal growth and social change (Taylor, 2009).

Greene (1995) also calls for significant transformative encounters, as she passionately advocates for an engagement that honors "pluralism" (p. 155). In my view, this perspective is prophetically pertinent in today's changing population demographics and an increasing enrollment of older learners returning to higher learning. Greene (1995) promotes "continuous and authentic personal encounters" for the transformative value in disrupting a "categorizing and distancing" of people, wherein "people are less likely to be treated instrumentally, to be made 'other' by those around" (p. 155). In this, Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte's and my experiences of return to the university classroom provide a contribution to authentic engagement in education for a discovery of commonality in difference, such as the desire for acceptance, belonging, meaning, and understanding, and the need of relationship, being heard, to contribute, and be needed. The call to a transformative education is certainly overdue, and changing times is a perfect catalyst for its implementation in university.



**Life writing in transformational education.** Butterwick and Lawrence (2009) assert that incorporating various art forms, like storytelling and life writing, into teaching “enhance learning and creates spaces for transformation to occur” (p. 35). Transformative learning takes form through an allowance for “shape-shifting” or embodiment, offered through the arts (p. 35). Butterwick and Lawrence (2009) purport that the arts offer the opportunity to remake “self, emotions, thoughts, worldviews, and relationships,” for creating a more “inclusive and truthful” alternative process of learning (p. 35). This value within life writing becomes apparent in the examination of Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte’s and my stories of experience, as our “taken-for-granted assumptions” emerge and prompt reconsideration for an individual personal and collective change (Butterwick & Lawrence, 2009, p. 35).

Life writing also contributes to transformational learning by offering authentic encounters that “shows others what is seen” from the mature learner’s own inner perspective, and so “enriching” another’s “understanding not only of their own culture but also of themselves” (Greene, 1995, p. 161). The showing of “alternative vantage points” (p. 161) through an intimate encounter with Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte and myself, through life writing, offers a disruption of “equilibrium and uniformity” (p. 161) in the learning environment. Without “losing the consciousness of who” we are (p. 165), a surfacing of “fixities” (p. 163) then ensues. In the process, the imagined identity of otherness (p. 163) may be confronted for a transformation in being and becoming. For example, in my experience, I returned to academia very hesitant and fearful. I only took courses with my husband initially. Yet, I eventually found my voice, and discovered a determination and courageousness, and my person emerged in new ways. In the experience of Charlotte, an imagined identity of otherness (p. 163) is created. She projects onto others, and even herself, an identity that becomes steadfast. Her mind remains fixed and a lack of conciliation occurs.

Considering the mature learners’ backdrop of life experience, a process of critical

self-reflection involving discourse with others through life writing is offered for rich realizations of needed change. This process of examination and dialogue, through story, informs a new cycle of “action-reflection-action,” (Johnston, 2011, p. 4) for a greater understanding of who we are and for positive social transformation to take place. The mature adult’s “depth and breadth of life experience can be used as a resource for...learning” (Lawton & La Porte, 2013, p. 315) leading to a “wide-awakeness” (Greene, 1995, p. 35), or “awareness of what it is to be in the world” (p. 35). In this case, Rob points to the reality that dreams are for living, and each day becomes the journey. Rosemary demonstrates that personal interests and learning preferences shape teaching styles. Charlotte portrays the importance of relationship as learner, as well a teacher. I point out the fact that we are always becoming, no matter what our age. The mature adult learner and one’s lived experience, rendered through story, provide vital perspectives for an education of change.

### **Closing Reflections**

In conclusion, when stories are the heart of research, read and re-read in this case, a more transformative and democratic practice emerges in our personal understanding, our interrelationships as learners and educators, and our classrooms as a whole, where “creative imaginings, pluralism and hope is possible” and even becomes actualized (Rautin & Ibrahim, 2011, p. 23). As the experiences of the mature adult student become integrated into institutional contexts such as the classroom, multiple forms of knowing emerge, much like a Socratic “pluralistic dialogue,” affording a decentering of self for a more just, caring, and meaningful “living” and “evolving” curriculum (Rautin & Ibrahim, 2011, pp. 30-31). As Greene (1995) suggests, learning must become an active event of “looking through multiple perspectives” and “building bridges” (p. 167). In this way, we begin to replace the mere transfer or deposit of information (Freire, 2005). The experiences of Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte and myself provoke an “active attention” (Greene, 1995, p. 152) of “reflectiveness and care” (p.

153) toward others, our imagining, our questioning, our connecting, and our challenging of what is “officially interpreted, defined, and named,” making way for educational change on multiple levels, including the individual, the exchange of learning and the institutional programs in which we become “other.” Forces of powerlessness, indifference, and stifling meaningless imitation are reexamined in light of new relational understandings and perspectives, as evidenced in the stories share in this study (Greene, 1978). This is transformational education, a learning that is vital to being.

## Chapter 6

### The Educational Significance of Transformative Tensions

My research objective in this thesis was to investigate the experiences of older adults returning to university. The genesis of this project stems from my own personal experience of returning to university as a mature adult. My experience generated greater understanding of the unique needs and offerings of older adults, and their impact on current and future university programming, curriculum, and teaching delivery, as they became teachers and sought a new beginning in their third age of life.

My story, along with Rob, Rosemary and Charlotte's, holds educational significance both to my own self-knowledge, but also to a greater audience who will gain knowledge through the art of life writing and the experiences of the older adult student returning to university. My goal is to support mature learners in this time of transition, and open and influence others to realize the valuable contributions of the third age student toward a more personal, pertinent, empathetic, and transforming university education.

Through my study of mature adult students returning to art education, it is evident that our vulnerable, authentic stories contribute to a holistic perspective of being. Significant issues and theoretical concepts surface for a further examination of the meaning of education, its goals, and its methods. New definitions of success, a consideration of values, and ineffective and effective forms of university programming have emerged. Our perspectives and experiences shed light on the complex social relationships underway in university classrooms, as well as how variables in the learning equation shape-shift in relation to our individual needs as mature learners. Therefore, we are challenging the implementation of traditional current curriculum, structures, and delivery methods that are designed for younger students. In this, a consideration on "what it means to be human" (Shuebrook, 2015, p. 12) emerges as

essential for “supportive,” “respectful,” and “even affectionate, human relationships and love of creative necessity and diversity” within education. Returning to learning becomes conducive to creating “a place for everyone to grow, to transform as they [can]” (p. 13) for a collective whole.

Through the use of life writing, the common thread between personal and public ways of listening and learning is afforded, and the stories of Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte and my own are in effect symbiotic with meaning, aiding a holistic perspective on knowledge creation to emerge. As a mode of educational inquiry, data collection, analysis, and representation for my research (Leavy, 2009), life writing has allowed “the humanity of learning” (Sinner, et al., 2015, p. 167) to come to the forefront of learning, therein advancing life experience, relationship, and empathy as essential for an education of meaning and purpose. Coming to know, in university classrooms, is then a holistic, active process whereby subjectivity, an inevitable aspect of humanity, is validated (Lonergan, 1971) Through the artistic literary form of life writing, “what matters most, what sustains, what places are inhabited” (Sinner et al., 2015, p. 170) resonates from the stories to thematic interpretations of relationships, values, challenges, which demonstrate clearly “what the heart is given to” (Chambers et al., 2012, p. xxvi). Storying through life writing becomes a meaningful, enduring, pertinent form of andragogic insight, and a guide to an education for being, living, and transforming. Our stories reveal responsive acts of self-integration and self-transcendence for newness and transformation, as well as the challenges of invisibility, misunderstanding, lack of support, and unrecognized experience.

In this way, education becomes a living process, begetting an “individual and collective embodied knowledge” (Smith, 2012, p. xxiii). Through an “aesthetically composed and ethically conscientious” story of “body, heart, mind, spirit, and imagination” (Sinner et al., 2015, p. 166), new personal and cultural meanings are afforded, essential in a day of demographic and societal changes. Through working together, dialogue and a

“mutual construction of the frame of reference” (Noddings, 2012, p. 238) precipitates an empathetic attunement essential for a commitment to caring in our learning relationships. The commitment to “a physical, emotional, and moral practice” invites a “rethinking” of current obsolete stereotypical perceptions of the mature student and education for a healthy development of today and tomorrow’s multigenerational educational academy (Sinner, et al., 2015, p. 170, 172). Holistic and transformative education becomes imperative to learn. Without this, education truly becomes meaningless.

My research ‘humanizes’ curriculum through storied, lived experiences. We collectively and individually focus on what may be best described as a living curriculum, where what is taught is less important than how it is taught, and why it is taught. My research then calls for a re-examination of assumptions of aging, and increased understanding of the mature adult student, for a creation of an education for a changing world. As “adulthood gives way to later life, issues of meaning maybe again arise” (Weiss & Bass, 2002, p 13), calling for a new or change of career. The third age of good health and fewer family obligations invites these new choices. Educational institutions must adjust, provide support, and be ready to create new forms of engagement for those who have extensive life experience as they return to university to embrace new choices for articulating meaning and purpose.

O’Donoghue (2015) asserts, “with every new beginning there is the possibility that a different order might eventually emerge’ (p. 1), and this is repeatedly witnessed as Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte and I took up the challenge of new beginnings in teacher education, and specifically art education. Our life writing provided in-depth examples of rich insights, a remix of new and old learning perspectives, and authentic passion in which uncertainties, confidence, frustrations, anger, and joy emerge for a creation of meaning. Through our “senses, bodies, minds, and emotions” (Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, pp. 908-909), our struggle for determination allows for conceptions of

“possibilities unthought of before” (pp. 908-909). Yet as well, our challenges reveal a needed restructuring of well-established frameworks of university education, calling for more complex educational practices and programming that respects, supports, and incorporates the older adult learner for greater endorsement of the value of wisdom, inclusivity, empathetic understanding, lifelong learning and a lived curriculum.

In response, provocative questions surfaced in the course of this study, such as: How can university programming better meet the needs of the mature student? How might universities better prepare for teaching older adult students? In what ways might professors better negotiate relationships with older adult learners for outcomes that benefit not only the mature student, but the entire class as well as instructor? What critical issues are being ignored, but need examination regarding the adult students returning to formal education? What are the core tensions between young faculty and older adult students that need deeper consideration?

The stories of Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte, and my experience will continue to serve as entry points, and I believe our stories will provide meaningful interpretations to be investigated further, as each story distinctly generates multiple themes for learning. Rob’s story becomes a narrative of openness and relationship to the unknown, while Rosemary’s experience reveals a story of advocacy wherein she lives out a pragmatic, critical relationship with learning. Charlotte’s experience manifests a story of resistance regarding the learning and teaching relationship, and my own experience unfolds a contrasting story of self-actualization, wherein learning becomes a journey into myself in which I gain new views of self.

This case study, informed by grounded theory, did not generate a new theory, but aligned the research with key areas of study in education, which potentially adds to this conversation through the stories. Reflecting upon the outcomes of this study, there are five core concepts that have emerged, and that await further research as a potential model or theory of education for third agers. In my review of the stories, these key

concepts continue to reverberate: **1) duality** emerges as the mature adult lives in two worlds, one within and one outside of university, and the continual, complex navigation of these divergent spaces is a form of knowledge exchange, often creating tensions within the learner. Duality dictates that mature learners are both at the centre of learning and on the periphery of learning, oscillating between these locations. Rob, for example, describes feeling he is not included in the lives of his classmates because of his age. Yet later in his story, he described belonging to a community of students much younger than him, and how much that engagement and socialization is part of his journey; **2) extending duality, ambiguity** is a second core concept, as our university experiences articulate feelings that vacillate between a sense of belonging and inclusion, and the realities of isolation and exclusion. As the stories reveal, often we are unsure. We are not necessarily able to navigate the nuances of the classroom, that is, the subtext of the teacher-student relationship, or the student-student relationship, and this is reflected in commentary on curriculum, instruction, and socialization; **3) building on duality and ambiguity, the notion of dialectic** operates between lived experience and curriculum, with considerations of context and being, facilitating dialogue, but also within that interaction, there reside contentions and even conflict, as Charlotte's story eloquently describes her experience both in the classroom and within the program structure; **4) amplifying dialectic exchange, the concept of power** materializes within the dynamics of learning institutions, in particular, an awareness of how institutions operate, but also within the individual learner. All stories demonstrate the mature learning in-relation-to the institution, and how over the course of a year, they build confidence and resistance to that same institution. Knowing we already possess life knowledge equal to or at times beyond that of an instructor is a significant power shift that mature learners represent in universities; and **5) the culmination of key outcomes in this study** evolve around a need for an active, accommodating, **living curriculum** that allows risk and divergent thinking, an organic approach to curriculum and instruction, in contrast to the often fixed models



and methods of teaching and learning that remain within teacher education. I consider myself fortunate to be living in a time where deep, respectful, contemplative, heart-based listening to the voices of others, and our own self, is becoming acknowledged, respected, and valued in academic research. In personal reflection, I realize I have changed as a consequence. I have approached my learning and my research as a form of living curriculum, which aligns with both my methodological approach and the theoretical perspectives that emerged from my interpretations. My educational experience of research has enabled a deep examination of my own holistic spiritual perspectives for an expanded personal being and becoming, and for a greater interconnected worldview.

In this, I have come to realize that the educational significance of my study resides in the developmental influence of a worldview in learning, and this is an area I foresee investigating further in terms of mature learners. Our educational systems greatly shape the world and values of tomorrow. Therefore it is a vital key in the development a humane society and sustainable future. Roenpagel, (2015) states that “an interplay exists between and among a worldview, values, educational goals and purposes, learning theory, and educational practice” (p. 39) and so, “worldview – that is, innermost belief about our humanness” has direct effect on education, both “philosophically and pedagogically” (p. 39). I have come to realize the importance of worldview in education, as it affects how learners and teachers perceive themselves and each other, how a student learns, how a teacher teaches, and how they interact and respond. In addition, a person’s definition, attitude, motivation, and purpose regarding learning and teaching will be influenced by one’s view of the world. In researching my own learning experience, and those of Rob, Rosemary, and Charlotte, I also see worldview is privileged by experience; a worldview that reflects tenets of a holistic and transformative education.

As a result, I advocate for further consideration of “alternative visions of education” (Rogenpagel, 2015, p. 39). Resonating with Rogenpagel (2015), I suggest “alternative frameworks seems a matter of urgency and necessity” (p. 39) in furthering relevant and meaningful education that will promote a holistic worldview, therefore an interconnectedness, interdependent consciousness for learning that extends beyond material and competitive values of Western individualism. My view is supported by “the emergence of a discursive shift” in educational discussion, as never before, which incorporates “contemporary interpretation of spirituality” that is “compatible with secular systems” (Rogenpagel, 2015, p. 40). Such a worldview encourages meaningful discussion and interrogation of existential, transcendental, and ‘ultimate’ questions about the meaning of life necessary to a holistic and transformational internal development where learning thrives.

This use of the word ‘spiritual’ is not to be equated with “religious,” but instead refers to a personal and collective contemplative consideration of inclusive views of the world represented in the existence of a diversity of spiritual worldviews. The spiritual then relates not to “external structures” of religion, but to an “internal development” where the body, mind, and emotions impress experience, and allow the creation and exploration of innermost, personal philosophies regarding the value and meaning of life (p. 43). Therefore, a contemporary interpretation of spirituality in art education addresses the notion of “interconnectedness” as a “non-sectarian” approach for “connections with self, others, and the transcendent” (p. 44) for a development of holistic perspectives, and so, the realization of a larger unity or whole, and the development of “humility, compassion, and an ethic of caring” (p. 44). This “other than ego-consciousness” is a notion in which self is part of a greater whole and so identity becomes a complex discovery in view of others. As a greater spiritual perspective is invited, vital educational processes and outcomes can occur, in contrast to the dominant

scientific and competitive outlooks favored in education today.

Alternative spiritual frameworks within education become gateways to personal encounter and inner experience for a necessary regain of a lost balance in education. Here the potential of contemplative inquiry provides a means to explore significance wherein learning becomes a creative, exciting, and meaningful process of discovery for living. In this view, arts-based learning and inquiry, be that visual, textual and/or performative, could certainly allow for spiritual perspectives and contemplative considerations to emerge. For example, this is an outlook in learning promoted by Walsh, Bickel and Leggo (2014) in their exploration of artistic disciplines (dance, drama, music, visual art, writing, queer performative, autoethnography, and poetics) as a mode of inquiry that is functional, spiritual, and a rigorous contemplative practice in research and teaching for a transformational educational paradigm. Rogenpagel (2015) also offers a view of important aspects conducive to an integration of a spiritual approach to learning that are applicable to art education. He references the fact that “themes of religion, spirituality and the sacred have been essential elements for the production of artworks throughout time and cultures” (p. 41). In this way, art has always offered unique openings for contemplative considerations as it allows expression and discourse of meaningful spiritual perspectives for being in the world. And so, an engagement with art and its process of creation becomes especially valuable for reflective and existential questions. Additionally, the integration of visual culture and contemporary art offer a visual lens for an outlook that extends beyond the self, for a 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary interpretation of spirituality that is indeed emerging in the academy. The visual lens can provide for a meaningful examination of self and society, for a development of a more holistic compassionate consciousness where “higher aims” of human significance emerge, and “ethics of love and caring” are cornerstones of curriculum and instruction (Roenpagel, 2015, p. 45). Through creative processes, art education offers a context for questioning, imagining, and rethinking identity, sense of self, and consideration of

individual and collective purpose. All these aspects contribute to the development of theory relating to mature students of the third age.

The older adult holds an extended view of life beyond the self, as we see embedded in Rob, Rosemary, Charlotte, and my own storied experiences in learning. In fact, the mature adult's desire of "intimate commitment to others widens to a more general concern for guiding and supporting the next generation" (Fager & Fadiman, 2006, p. 183). Our approach to learning is founded in a deep desire to contribute to community and society, and therefore a career of teaching in my view adds a holistic perspective that becomes vital in and toward alternative educational frameworks inclusive of spirituality. For example, both Rob and I speak of our personal Christian faith. Rosemary displays deep concern and appreciation for relational aspects of teaching and learning. Charlotte demonstrates her passionate desire for a learner's realized potential all share spiritual qualities.

On a final note, I consider myself fortunate to be living in a time where deep, respectful, contemplative, heart-based listening to the voices of others and self is becoming an acknowledged, respected, and valued as a tool in academic research. Upon reflection, my personal spiritual views have been important to my learning experience and research, for a position of openness and humility guides my ways of being a learner and a teacher. In and through education, my own worldview has expanded for a deeper and stronger educational perspective leading to an appreciation of human diversity, commonality, and uniqueness. A sense of interconnection and interdependence has been further developed and increasingly valued for the relationships in the classroom and for relationships outside the classroom that contribute toward collective meaning and purpose in which individual significance is integral. In this, learning has been an adventure of discovery and wonder that has led me to a stance of richly textured thankfulness. Through this study, I have gained a new appreciation for life experience

that privileges a seeing of the value of, and in, each moment, arguably a site of learning too often missed. My new appreciation for experience provides for an authentic worldview that embraces a meaning in all things, leading to childlike discovery in learning, a learning for life, and in life.

I am no longer the Cindy who returned to university full of fear and self-doubt. Instead, I am Cindy who has experience to add to, learn from, share with others, and be proud of who I have become. Doing this research study has opened my eyes to realize that my story, as well as the stories of other mature learners, holds wonderful worth. I am not too late, too old, past due, or out of date. Yes, I have much to learn, and thankfully so. Yet I have learned much and have much to teach. Through the stories of other mature learners, I have come to see myself, and learned that possibilities are not only an imagination away, but achievable goals. My own life has been a witness of this fact. I never dreamed of living in Canada, having three sons, attending university in Montreal, or pursuing a Master's degree, or writing this thesis. In this, I have come to realize life includes my own perceived abilities, as well as inabilities. I am invited to "enjoy the ride," as Rob often stated, and "enjoy the journey." I have gained a more joyful and empathetic view of myself, for a more fluid script of who I am, my part to play, and to live for the future. I do not have to know the end of the story. Living my story is what is important, and knowing the outcomes will provide surprises. The uncertainty has its own reward.

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### APPENDIX A - INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

“Transformative tensions in the third age: Mature students and the changing face of teacher education”

1. What was your career before returning to post-secondary education?
2. Why did you decide to return to University?
3. Why Art Education?
4. Does being a mature student affect your learning experience? If yes, how?
5. What expectations did you have in returning to university?
6. What are some of the challenges you have faced in returning to education?
7. What is missing in your learning experience?
8. How has returning to learning contributed to your self-actualization as a learner?
9. Do you find your life experience useful to your current education? If so, how? If no, why not?
10. How is learning now, different from when you were in your 20s?
11. In what ways does your presence as a mature learner affect the classroom?
12. How do you feel learning with younger students?
13. Does the university program structure fit with your needs as a mature learner?
14. Does the design and delivery of curriculum take into account your life experiences?
15. As a mature student, how is your experience of becoming a teacher different?
16. In what ways has Art Education provided you new forms of meaning making to your life?
17. What important qualities do you feel mature learners bring to a second career in art education?
18. Based on your experience, what changes would you recommend to the program that would best benefit other mature learners?
19. What suggestions do you have for teachers working with mature learners?
20. Is there anything else you would like to add?



### APPENDIX B – THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Theme	RELATIONSHIP: Mature learner connections, state of being with others, within their university experience
Sub-Theme #1	Alienation / Belonging / Stereotypes
ROB	<p>“So, you are done now with school?”          “No” I said, “But yes, I have 3 more years.”          “Three more years? That’s like crazy!”</p> <p>But to other people (students), I’m creepy... I swear they looked at me and said, “Danger Stranger” or “Stranger Danger,” or whatever the line is, cause I’m sure I’m just creeping them out!</p> <p>This last week this kid said, “What the fuck is that?” I said, “That should be my T-shirt!” because everything I see, I say that. I have no idea. My whole life is that right now.</p> <p>...a student showed her painted color wheel. My response was “What the hell is that?” Ha! Not the right response, to say the least!</p> <p>But, there’s a break, right? So, it’s challenging, because I don’t have anyone to really study with. The day of a quiz, if I went to class an hour or two before, I will bump into a couple of people and sit with them and possibly review. But I’m not invited. I’m not in that particular little group.</p> <p>Most teachers realize this valid complication, because we can’t compete at the same level as the younger students.</p> <p>But, at the same time, there is definitely a strong sense of community within the circle of students I am in. Within the program, I don’t feel like an outcast at all. I feel like I belong.</p> <p>But, in education, we don’t treasure each other in a class setting. I mean students and teachers. We don’t try to understand who’s sitting beside you</p> <p>People are in awe of me to be in school...Others think I’m nuts. I was settled and I put a lot at risk by doing this. I put my future at risk.</p> <p>There’s a man’s world out there. It’s not the same. The reactions of men are like, “Are you crazy doing this?”</p> <p>A man who is changing careers, who comes to university, is very rare; its almost harder, has less acceptance within society, and there is probably more opposition to it. Even if there is approval, like, “Oh, that’s really cool!” there is still the response, “What are you doing it for? <i>Why</i> would you do it?” It’s difficult. Society still has stereotypes and it’s hard.</p> <p>I should be the stable provider, and stability doesn’t mean going back to school.</p>

	<p>I'm actually thrilled with being part of this community. It's where I belong. The teachers and students have been real cool with me in that I don't feel any different. I'm not set aside, but welcomed.</p> <p>Being a mature student is at a disadvantage though, in being able to connect. I'm limited with who I can "group project!" with. I'm not chosen. Kids want to be with their friends. I would too. It's another dimension to being a mature student. It's more difficult in these ways.</p>
ROSEMARY	<p>"Look, I've been rejected, but I don't feel that you have really considered what I have to offer here." ...soon after, I received an acceptance letter. I was thrilled!</p> <p>Later on, I burned my letter of rejection! I burned it as a ceremonial type of saying goodbye to the rejection.</p> <p>They accepted me as a "mature student"...</p> <p>I want to have my kids be able to "check" their Mom had a "university education." So, I kind of did it for them, but also for myself, because now I can say, "Highest Education? Yes. University."</p> <p>There were many times I wanted to quit. Many times! I'd be sitting on a bus, saying, 'What the heck am I doing here? Why am I not sleeping like the rest of the universe is right now?</p> <p>I have really strong relationships with two other students my age from school.</p> <p>So in reality, it didn't matter being surrounded by younger people. I met some very gifted young people along the way. I don't know, they probably thought, "Who's that crazy lady in the class?"</p>
CHARLOTTE	<p>Honestly, I am so sick and tired of stupid systems, and the idiot bureaucrats in university who sit back behind a big desk and make decisions that they have no right to make, because they are not out in the current classrooms.</p> <p>One teacher in particular, a prof in my 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year, was always interested in my input, let me talk, ask me questions, and involve me.</p>

CHARLOTTE	<p>I would come to school, study, and, leave. There was no time for campus life for me.</p> <p>I never could say anything!</p> <p>No matter their graduate degree, teachers obviously don't have enough training if they are avoiding this issue, and, if they are ignoring me when I bring this issue forward. I'd raise my hand and would automatically be ignored.</p> <p>This whole public school education system is so screwed up. This is not how I learn.</p> <p>There was a blatant favoritism for those who adhere to the taught teaching and philosophy in the university classroom...Do you know how often I experienced that? I thought, no one would believe that this is going on in the classroom.</p> <p>What downright angered me and made me really sad, was that I was ignored when I said, "Yeah, but, I have to say..." I was not even acknowledged when I raised my hand. I was literally ignored by the prof. I felt like she felt I had nothing to contribute, or, I was a threat.</p> <p>...I found with young female profs there is almost this competition. There shouldn't be this kind of thing!</p> <p>Sometimes students rolled their eyes at me.</p> <p>So, often, mature students were disrespected by younger students and teachers.</p> <p>I only felt condescension and arrogance. This can cause mature students to feel very insecure and feel, "Oh my god, this is beyond me. I'm too old, too late!"</p> <p>One positive thing I can say is I was able to enter university as a 'mature entry.' I didn't have to do as many credits, because of my former academic achievements.</p> <p>The instructor seemed to say, "You piss me off, don't talk anymore. I'm the authority, and that's it!"</p> <p>So I've figured out this is not my world.</p> <p>I felt I had much to offer in the teaching program, but was questioned on everything.</p>
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CHARLOTTE	<p>I was so angry I went home and cried. I wasn't crying because I was sad, but because I was angry, so angry.</p> <p>I'm old. I know what I want...But then, my metaphor (representing the teaching self, my philosophy) was not good enough.</p> <p>I see now, I would do much better in the Community Art Education where we can address diversity. It's a give and take dynamic relationship.</p>
CINDY	<p>To return to what I left was unthinkable. But I often wondered: Was I capable of being a successful student, and if so, to actually teach? Did I, or would I, offer anything? Maybe I was too old?</p> <p>After two years of general courses, I discovered I could enter Art Education and was truly welcomed 'home,' for it had been a childhood dream to become an art teacher.</p> <p>Often I was flooded with a feeling that I could not catch up...</p> <p>I struggled with the belief that being older, I should do well, if not better, than younger students. I battled back and forth between feeling that I had so much I wanted to say, seeing far beyond what my young peers understood about life, while other times feeling I had nothing to offer. I wondered if others felt that way about me too. I fluctuated between two conflicting expectations: I am older, I should know; but I'm older, so I don't know.</p> <p>Being outside the social norm because of my age, I felt invisible...</p> <p>But would anyone really want to hire me?</p> <p>As a mature woman, I am sometimes blinded by society's focus on youth, but I am determined to defy stereotypes.</p>
Sub-Theme #2	Identity/Roles: family, peers and professors, mature adult students, gender
ROB	<p>...to live beyond <i>my</i> wildest dreams--to do something that seemed out of reach, out of the norm, or seemingly beyond. To <i>do</i> it. I made the decision to return to university to become an elementary school teacher.</p> <p>I have lots to prove, yet I have nothing to prove, because I don't need to create a life, I already have my life, and I'm not going to have more children; I can just totally devote whatever years I'm allowed, to do this. I have really no obligations, or very limited obligations. I'm coming into the next five years, or 10 years, a very quiet time in my life.</p>

ROB	<p>...you're just a guy, and there's only a very few guys in the class. One of them hits on every girl, so they don't talk to him, and I'm like the comfortable older gay guy.</p> <p>I'm not their Dad.</p> <p>I'm also their peer...they can say things that I don't think they would say under normal circumstances</p> <p>I remember looking for the classroom. I saw a lady who looked closer to my age than anyone else. I figured, well, I would connect with her. So I asked, "What class are you looking for?" It turned out she was looking for the same class, but she was the Professor.</p> <p>It's interesting being older than most of the people I am in school with. I don't think the kids I study with realize that I'm their father's age, you know? I'm also their peer, right? The peer shines through more.</p> <p>...Given the environment, I'm their peer, so it goes through. I listen to how these kids talk and try and understand, and I see things. They like my goofy laugh, and call me the smart one. So, I figure I'll keep the illusion going for a bit longer. Ha!</p> <p>But, they don't get it--can't get it. I wouldn't get it. They don't get the responsibilities I have in life.</p> <p>Every night I try, as much as possible, to have supper and go for a walk with my wife, and also watch one show with my kids. These are critical things.</p> <p>In my journal, I compared it to juggling, not that I know how to juggle, but I understand the concept behind it. If there's three balls, the one you have to focus on is the one coming down. One is safe in your hands, and one's going up, but only one is important. So I constantly remind myself of which one I have to focus on. It would be the one coming down. Once you get it, there's another one coming down, and you focus on that one now. There's three or more, but there is one you have to shift your attention to at any given time. And that is the analogy for returning to learning for me. That is what it is all about. (can also apply to CHALLENGES: <i>learning to learn</i> or VALUES: <i>Living the moment</i>)</p> <p>I'm in different worlds. My loyalties are divided.</p> <p>A man's input is critical for girls and boys; many don't have it and need it.</p>
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ROB	<p>The teachers and students have been real cool with me in that I don't feel any different...We all have our fears, mature learners who have been away from school for a long time, and young students who have never left.</p> <p>But, we are not learning from each other and we could learn so much. There should be a place for that. It's understanding. But, we are not connecting. We would realize that we are all different. We would learn from each other. We could use each other in a positive way, so we all learn.</p>
ROSEMARY	<p>I want to have my kids be able to "check" their Mom had a "university education."</p> <p>As far as going back to school, my family was supportive, to a certain extent. I don't think my family really had a choice. They knew this was something I had wanted to do for a long time. I guess they could see how happy it made me, and the enjoyment I got out of it.</p> <p>When I first returned to university it was difficult, because my sons were a lot younger...Taking studio classes, I needed space to work...But, to have mom painting wasn't strange to them...I have a full studio room now, since my oldest son moved to the basement. But before this, I had to interrupt my family's environment to do my art work for school... But they knew I was fulfilling something, getting it out of my system, so they were fine with that. Also, I paid for university from my pay cheque, strictly semester-by-semester. So for that part, it went okay.</p> <p>There is traffic, and it was particularly hard in the winter. But luckily the instructors were fairly understanding. I always made a point of having my homework done so that even if I were to walk into a critique that was already started, I could put my stuff up immediately. I could merge in an ongoing critique and participate right away</p> <p>One particular professor I had a hard time with. He was a Masters student. I felt that he didn't understand art as well as he should have. There were a couple of students who were having a rough time, and this was also something the young instructor didn't seem to understand.</p> <p>And when instructors speak from experience, they know. They've been there! It gives genuineness, so you know you can trust this person.</p> <p>Teachers have to be aware that the "boss dynamic" (<i>in students</i>) has to be fueled, encouraged, and challenged in their classrooms. Often times, I didn't think that this was covered in the Art Education classes.</p>
ROSEMARY	<p>Student teachers have to get the tools from their professors. That's the thing I loved about one professor in particular. She always treated us like adults. There was one other professor who had this same mindset. But not all of them.</p>

	<p>My mentor teacher (<i>at practicum site</i>), who was near my age, was amazing. I was definitely pleased to have her. This was a very positive thing!</p> <p>People are getting more internalized. I've sat in so many classrooms where a professor has tried to get a discussion going and students are not saying anything. They are texting or they are writing in their books, but they don't have their heads up so clearly there is a lack of interest there.</p> <p>...professors should be more attentive and aware that this happening in the class.</p> <p>Most of my instructors were my age, or a bit older, so I always felt like a peer to them. I felt always comfortable, at least for that.</p> <p>Often, the mature student will know as much as the professor, or even more, depending on what it is that is being taught. It is a bit of a freaky thing. It could be intimidating for the instructor, and the student even, because you are moving away from this safe place with a single leader in the classroom now. You've got two leaders, or three leaders. So it potentially could be a power struggle certainly, depending. In most cases, mature learners are respectful of that, so therefore they don't exert themselves.</p> <p>But, being with different ages is helpful, because you get to see up close what they are interested in, what triggers their learning. I prefer this diverse setting. They've got good energy, these kids.</p> <p>I met some very gifted young people along the way. I don't know, they probably thought, "Who's that crazy lady in the class?" I don't know. But it was fun.</p>
CHARLOTTE	<p>Being in university, I have come to realize different teachers teach differently. What I value most, I've seen in very few. In the first few courses of the program, to me, the profs were horrendous and I felt like, "God! I hope I survive this. Do I have the patience to endure this? Do I really, really have to endure this?"</p> <p>Universities really must take a close look on who they hire. A teacher must not be afraid to take risks, and be a divergent thinker. If you aren't, my honest belief is you are in the wrong profession.</p>

CHARLOTTE	<p>One teacher in particular, a prof in my 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year, was always interested in my input, let me talk, ask me questions, and involve me.</p> <p>And I liked learning with the younger student, but I was working and taking care of my kids so I would come to school, study, and, leave. There was no time for campus life for me. Studio classes are different. You talk and eat a bagel, so it's a different relationship.</p> <p>Most of my younger peers probably were like, "Oh you Old Goat! What are you doing? Why are you doing this?" A handful said, "Oh my god, I don't know how you do it! You have this, this, this, and you are going through this!" This came when I had to go, because my son had a seizure. They would realize what my life was like.</p> <p>I have a child who is disabled. He intellectually has learning difficulties, has seizures, mental health issues, and takes a slew of medication. He is not "run of the mill." He needs to have special attention.</p> <p>I teach disabled children; or "children with intellectual difficulties" and have developed a woodworking program for young teenage students, most of the students are 15 years of age.</p> <p>Unfortunately, some profs are completely disconnected from what really makes a student learn. At university I had these young teachers who need to listen. If they don't, it doesn't make them a good prof. They have this conceived idea, but it's their idea, not my idea. Teachers should listen to their students. Cause what is your end game? To have students succeed? Or, is it, "Here's my little formula: I see all the answers; this is right, this is right, and I'm done." Honey, you get paid to teach!</p> <p>Teachers need continuing education on who they are teaching. No matter their graduate degree, teachers obviously don't have enough training if they...are ignoring me when I bring this issue (<i>Special Needs</i>) forward.</p> <p>In university, some teachers wouldn't allow me to talk about Special Needs... Its not enough to just be told, "Well, we aren't talking about that." Why not? Why not?</p> <p>...we can all learn together. I can totally admit that. But teachers who think they know everything, and don't want to hear anything from students? This is the worst thing you can do, because you don't let anybody share. I'd raise my hand and would automatically be ignored.</p> <p>I have a Special Needs certificate.</p>
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CHARLOTTE	<p>There was a blatant favoritism for those who adhere to the taught teaching and philosophy in the university classroom... Do you know how often I experienced that? I thought, no one would believe that this is going on in the classroom. Even younger students who had a little slightly different outlook would be wrong. That's what I didn't like. Teachers must adapt and not just say, "This is the way you learn and how it is going to go!" No! There are other ways of learning. It's the divergent thinking model. It's in academic papers and publications, but nobody does it. They just talk about it!</p> <p>I did have this incredible young TA, when I just started university. He was flexible... if I can explain exactly what I think and get my point across, why the **** do I need more words?" I'm not a child, and, "I told you to do 10 words! You only gave me 7!" That's not what it's about.</p> <p>The age category that I am in is like a special need, in a sense. I have experience. I lived.</p> <p>What downright angered me and made me really sad, was that I was ignored when I said, "Yeah, but, I have to say..." I was not even acknowledged when I raised my hand. I was literally ignored by the prof. I felt like she felt I had nothing to contribute, or, I was a threat.</p> <p>And, I found with young female profs there is almost this competition. There shouldn't be this kind of thing!</p> <p>Of course, that reflected on the behavior of my peers. And the majority of university students are nauseatingly assured of themselves. Some were downright mean to the few older students. I got many times really angry... There was a lot of ignorance, and a lot of arrogance. Sometimes students rolled their eyes at me.</p> <p>So, often, mature students were disrespected by younger students and teachers. It rolled off me most of the time. At times I would walk out, saying, "I'm just going to the washroom."</p> <p>The worse time, I totally dismissed the teacher, and just had to say, "You know what? You don't know what you are talking about. Good luck!" I believe that a teacher like this should never, ever teach a mature student. I only felt condescension and arrogance. This can cause mature students to feel very insecure and feel, "Oh my god, this is beyond me. I'm too old, too late!"</p>
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CINDY	<p>I decided to go back to school where I would be exposed to and learn about a larger world, and I convinced my husband to return to school with me. This was not an easy change for us, or our sons. When they visited or returned for any extended time, our family routines conjured me to return to the rhythms of my mothering role, despite the fact I had assignments and projects to do.</p> <p>Despite all this, my biggest challenge was having been a traditional mother and wife. My family had been my foremost priority, and now my priority became me, for the first time.</p> <p>Feeling inadequate and ill-equipped, in my first year I only registered for classes that my husband was in. Our togetherness was the bridge I needed to find my way.</p> <p>I felt I required much more time to read and do assignments than the time given, and I struggled with the belief that being older, I should do well, if not better, than younger students.</p> <p>I battled back and forth between feeling that I had so much I wanted to say, seeing far beyond what my young peers understood about life, while other times feeling I had nothing to offer.</p> <p>I felt visible as a mom figure to some of my classmates, a reminder that I continued to wrestle with my conflicting roles at home and at school.</p> <p>I also encountered a private struggle. I experienced resentment and misunderstanding at times. I had day-to-day responsibilities that younger students did not have to be concerned with because I was sandwiched between my private and public worlds, at times caring for my aging mother and caring for my grown sons. Most of my peers were concerned about getting out of school and starting life. They were fearless with fresh ideas, and had more self-esteem.</p>
Theme	RELATIONSHIP: Mature learner connections, state of being with others, within their university experience
Sub-theme#3	Support/Lack of Support: family, school, professional
ROB	<p>Yet, I have to say, in other courses in education, the hardest thing is that I don't have a support group. I'm not going to be invited to someone's house for a PJ party to do our study notes! I'm not going to be on Facebook with them.</p>

ROB	<p>...there's a break, right? So, it's challenging, because I don't have anyone to really study with....That's a challenge, because it is helpful to study with other students.</p> <p>Support. As mature students, we don't have that... It's just a totally different world. It's like you are, in a lot of ways, an island. Everyone shakes my hand, likes my laugh, but if I fail, I fail on my own. I do need help.</p> <p>When I started the winter term, I wrote in my journal:  There is apprehension, but far less than what I experienced in September. I know I can succeed, even though God has known it all along. I am nervous and excited at the same time. I know this is where I am supposed to be. My only concerns are how to balance work and family. I am so blessed to be able to live the life I am living.</p> <p>As a working mature student, support comes in different ways. I'm in different worlds. My loyalties are divided. My biggest frustration is that everyone views your life as a portion. Work views me as a worker and wants 100% from me. School views me as a student, and wants 100% from me. I have my children, and they want 100% of me. And my wife wants her husband. Everyone wants 100%. But that's too many percent. Eventually you run dry, right?</p> <p>People who work for me, or my bosses, we don't talk about school. So, there's no support. They support me as much as giving me a pay cut, and allowing me to work and go to school, which is what I signed up for. That's fine. That's fair.</p> <p>My wife's sees everything, and very supportive. But, like everything, it's a challenge.</p> <p>I know I'm inspiring some people. In a way that is support.</p> <p>I'm also supported when someone asks me, "How is it going?" But it doesn't happen that often, which is fine.</p> <p>My children support me as much as they can support me. Then again, when it gets in their way, it's a different story. And I understand!</p> <p>So, I don't get a ton of support, but I don't get a ton of lack of support.</p> <p>But, at the same time, there is definitely a strong sense of community within the circle of students I am in.</p> <p>I could never have done it without the support and love of my wife.</p> <p>I'm told (<i>by friends who don't understand my choice</i>), "You know you won't find a job here."</p>

ROB	<p>My friend went back to school around five years ago, and he's eight years older than me. He's a mentor. He was very successful, and he just left it all. He knows. He understands and is an inspiration. They tell you, "Make sure, no matter what, to take these certain courses. Make sure!" Well again, they are all full. I ended up writing one professor. She didn't answer. I go for the other class, but the other is full. I write that professor and she writes back, "Oh, I would love to have you!" But then, I have to go through the Coordinator, who says, "Who gave you permission to write the teacher? You're not allowed doing that! Sorry! You can't get it." So, I phone the Dean and five minutes later I am in the course. It's annoying! I almost switched schools because of it. It's wrong, because you are playing with people's lives. Then, they only accept some past credits. It's a big difference for me. That's my life!</p> <p>...schools must continue to change. Universities have to realize time is valuable for the mature student. I can't waste time. In business we say, "Be easy to do business with!" Well, I am the client and I'm asked to give information, and to take certain courses. Then I'm told, I can't have anything. Facilitate my life so when I'm finished, I'm in control and can give back. Again, the situation was frustrating enough that I thought of leaving. You can't just say, "Well, that's the rule, so that's just the way it is." There is also exception to the rule. I think you still have to view an individual as an individual. You have to realize that I don't have the same responsibilities in terms of school. I know I don't get an extra 'handicap' mark just because I'm busy, but they could work with my schedule.</p>
ROSEMARY	<p>So I applied, but I got rejected the first time because my portfolio didn't comply. I was working during the days when they offered portfolio-coaching sessions.</p> <p>"Try and write an appeal letter and we'll reconsider your case."</p> <p>As far as going back to school, my family was supportive, to a certain extent. I don't think my family really had a choice. They knew this was something I had wanted to do for a long time. I guess they could see how happy it made me, and the enjoyment I got out of it.</p> <p>Taking studio classes, I needed space to work. I'm the type of person that I really didn't like working downtown in the spaces that were given to us. They were crowded, and to bring all your paraphernalia along and to try and create a workspace, I found that it was hugely challenging.</p> <p>So in the first few years I did most of my work at home, even though I didn't really have a studio space to work in at home</p>

ROSEMARY	<p>I would set up my stuff in my dining room on a Sunday and work all day. But it got easier as they started doing their own thing and we got into a new routine. So, it worked out. I have a full studio room now, since my oldest son moved to the basement. But before this, I had to interrupt my family's environment to do my art work for school.</p> <p>But they knew I was fulfilling something, getting it out of my system, so they were fine with that.</p> <p>So, Art Ed has actually been really instrumental in helping me find my way, because I am teaching now, so it's good.</p> <p>As a mature student, my days were long. Being in the part-time program, we were always the last ones to register; therefore, I was always in night school. I'm glad those days are over for night school, I really am. I was late coming from the West Island.</p> <p>I used the library a lot. The university library is amazing. There's amazing old volumes that you won't find in a regular library. But as far as library support, research support, technical support, or any of those kinds of services, the problem was that I was always a part-time student, coming in the evening while these people weren't even around. They were gone for the day.</p>
CHARLOTTE	<p>I knew being told, "You have to do this and this" was not going to fly with my special needs population. I was going to lose them. I actually got a "B" because I didn't adhere to the "formula" in one of my university classes. But, it doesn't work with these kids. I am here because I want to teach this particular population. I adapted. What did you want me to do, write a lesson according to what is expected at university and then not do it in the classroom? You give me a good grade, because I wrote what was wanted?... That class got my worst grade, because the teacher was completely inflexible.</p> <p>Of course, that reflected on the behavior of my peers.... [O]ften, mature students were disrespected by younger students and teachers.</p> <p>But I was criticized for my teaching method. I have been doing this for many years. My expertise was not considered. I have more experience than most will ever have with this population. Let me make my decisions in the classroom; I know what I'm doing!</p>
CHARLOTTE	<p>I was watched for a half hour, told I was wrong in my approach, and failed my practicum.</p> <p>...the site policy was completely dismissed. My reputation was affected</p>

CHARLOTTE	<p>due to 30 minutes of evaluation based on a formula that doesn't work in that population and a university program based on a narrow evaluation of what's important...I was so frustrated; I couldn't get over it. I was so angry I went home and cried. I wasn't crying because I was sad, but because I was angry, so angry. To me, it was totally unjust. The way things were handled was disgusting. I was shocked.</p> <p>What about commitment to good education? Do you have to suck up to higher authorities to get opportunities? Why do we have to adhere to this bullshit? Why do I have to do a <i>stage</i> when I have my own classroom? Honest to god, university programming needs to be flexible with life. They could come and see my program. See me teach. I developed a program. Would you look at it? Would you read it, then come and observe? Everything they want is there.</p> <p>Once or twice a week is not giving the whole picture, and I felt disassociated from my school. I was torn between what I had always done and what the university program expected. The program needs to consider we are working with human beings who are always moving, loving, talking, arguing, and learning from mistakes.</p> <p>Faculty must stay in touch with the teaching world out there.</p> <p>There was a blatant favoritism for those who adhere to the taught teaching and philosophy in the university classroom. And if it's just wanting the grade, then there is something wrong; that's not constructive learning.</p> <p>There needs to be an advisor just for mature students, because our needs are different. We don't have our whole life to go do "this," and then "that" for a while. We pretty much know what we want. Adapt a program to support them. Then too, pros who seem to think they know everything are pre-empted from dismissiveness. They would know where mature students are coming from and adapt.</p>
CINDY	<p>...my biggest challenge was having been a traditional mother and wife. My family had been my foremost priority, and now my priority became me, for the first time. And I wondered: Who would take care of me?</p> <p>I only registered for classes that my husband was in. Our togetherness was the bridge I needed to find my way. This program offered me hope that has since become reality. Through art education my understanding of myself and the world, and possibilities for the future, have been clarified and enlarged in a meaningful way.</p>
Theme	<p>VALUES: Judgments of what is important or worth, or principles guiding the mature learners experience in university.</p>

Sub-Theme #1	“Success”/living in the moment (mindfulness)/realization of and overcoming limits
ROB	<p>I enjoy people.</p> <p>The speaker challenged me further, to live beyond <i>my</i> wildest dreams--to do something that seemed out of reach, out of the norm, or seemingly beyond. To <i>do</i> it. “Beyond” is the most important part. I made the decision to return to university to become an elementary school teacher. Teach beyond, live beyond, dream beyond your wildest dreams. It seems almost surreal. Almost, I have to pinch myself. I’m so thankful for where I am right now in this life, no regrets. To dream beyond what I’ve ever dreamed possible.</p> <p>I am privileged to have access to this education.</p> <p>I really want this to be an adventure, a journey, not just the destination. If all I focus on is the finish line, I will miss everything else that is happening around me, and the realization that life is a journey and we are not there yet.</p> <p>But it’s infinity if you don’t start it! Now I have a quarter done; a manageable number that I’ve broken it down to. I’d like to say I’m three quarters done, but maybe I will look back, or <i>hopefully</i> I will look back at this time and say this was fun. But hopefully, I will <i>also</i> realize it in the moment.</p> <p>It is process, not outcome. There is always process, and that’s really why I’m doing it, regardless of the outcome.</p> <p>I mean, I realize now, university is not a thing way off in the distance. It’s attainable.</p> <p>I just try to stay focused and not get overwhelmed, because it’s easy to. I try to take one step at a time, not look too far ahead, and stay optimistic, you know?</p> <p>I find it interesting how you can just be discouraged in life by such little things, but can also be encouraged. Like when I was able to logon to the Internet at school.</p> <p>I had no idea how to search for anything! Now I can find an article on anything.</p> <p>My memory is definitely improving, but maybe the biggest improvement has been a realization that I can succeed. Maybe that’s the number one achievement.</p> <p>I mean, I realize now, university is not a thing way off in the distance. It’s attainable.</p> <p>I can’t stay up doing papers. I do the best I can, then that’s what teachers get. I’m not going to rework it over and over; at a certain point I just shut the book on it.</p>
ROB	

In my journal, I compared it to juggling, not that I know how to juggle, but I understand the concept behind it. If there's three balls, the one you have to focus on is the one coming down. One is safe in your hands, and one's going up, but only one is important. So I constantly remind myself of which one I have to focus on. It would be the one coming down. Once you get it, there's another one coming down, and you focus on that one now. There's three or more, but there is one you have to shift your attention to at any given time. And that is the analogy for returning to learning for me. That is what it is all about.

I went in wanting to survive, and I came out excelling. This has set the bar very high, and so I now have a very high standard of achievement to keep up....after high school, I went to CGEP...I went into commerce, nowhere near any of my passions. I failed for a number of reasons, probably just lack of discipline. I had no passion. I did graduate, but it took me an extra year. I left school at that point. What was left in my mind was that I fail at school. For 25 years I carried that. I had to break that in my first semester of university. But it was challenging.

I remember talking to a professor who helped me see that I'm not a failure. Success is the pattern. Failure is not the pattern. Failure was the exception. But it was a hard, a hard shift to make.

Old thought patterns are so very, very overwhelming. But, now I go into school and I don't assume I'll fail. In fact, I won't fail---I don't fail. I don't fail! Even classes that I didn't like--I did exceedingly well in, partly because I wanted to prove I could.

Success, I think, is application. If I can apply it somehow to my life, that's a key and I think I'm able to do this, due to maturity.

The art classes were totally different from my other education classes. All the insecurities of being a child were brought to the surface.



ROB	<p>Yet, I had to just go forward. For the first class we were asked only one thing: to stare at the other person and draw. I didn't realize it then, but the playing field was being made equal. I was given a reason for it to not look as one would imagine a portrait should look. The freedom it brought! It was a revelation moment. For me, it was a success.</p> <p>The art class was quite a bit to take in, and a lot to begin to overcome. The damage done to a child can at times, last a lifetime. That day was an important first step in reversing the damage.</p> <p>The (<i>art</i>) classes continued to be a journey deeper into the unknown, which, in many ways, is the known. It was new, while in other ways I found myself falling into assumed perspectives. It was a challenge to stay within the lines, even though that request was never made. It's all I knew. Entering my last art class, I remembered the fear and trepidation I felt the first week of the course. I did not leave the course as I entered. Through art, I realized I can enjoy the process regardless of the outcome. I can draw outside the lines and rediscover.</p> <p>Art in many ways is a reflection of who we are and how we choose to express ourselves. I really don't want to have to live out my life inside the lines.</p> <p>Then, when working with clay, I realized that clay and our lives have a lot in common. The finished product is simply a reflection of what was seen all along in your mind, the imagined outcome. There is no right or wrong.</p> <p>For so long, I had focused only on what it ended up looking like. I had missed the point. Art, like life, is a journey. Enjoy the ride. There is so much more to learn and discover. I am thankful for having my mind and eyes opened to this.</p> <p>...the advantage though, is that I have life experience! I think it's the largest advantage. I have the ability to see what is applicable, and hopefully retain it. I don't take all the information. As you age, you see what is important.</p> <p>I mean I could give more to the classes I am in because I had life experiences. I view things differently, just as I benefit from those around me and there is more of them. It's an unfiltered world I'm living in, right?</p> <p>But, in education, we don't treasure each other in a class setting. I mean students and teachers.</p>
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ROB	<p>We don't try to understand who's sitting beside you, who has a whole lot of experience, lacks in a lot of things for sure, but in other things, a wealth of experience.</p> <p><i>(He quotes from In his winter term journal entry)</i> "There is apprehension, but far less than what I experienced in September. I know I can succeed, even though God has known it all along. I am nervous and excited at the same time. I know this is where I am supposed to be. I am so blessed to be able to live the life I am living."</p> <p>When I first entered the program, I wrote my philosophy of learning. It's a cliché, but again, I viewed it as a journey. We have to focus on building the pathway in the bigger picture. I want to graduate, become a teacher. But no matter how smart I am, no matter how good I do in school, I can't get to the end destination right now. Time has to pass. In learning, we often become fixated on the end result, get overwhelmed, and give up. It's sad.</p>
ROSEMARY	<p>I said, "I'm not going to take this!"... There was this wonderful person who worked in the registrar's office. I took it upon myself to approach him directly. "Look, I've been rejected, but I don't feel that you have really considered what I have to offer here."</p> <p>Later on, I burned my letter of rejection! I burned it as a ceremonial type of saying goodbye to the rejection.</p> <p>They accepted me as a "mature student," but officially I was listed as, "Without a Portfolio." So, for the longest time it stated that on my transcripts... So, anyway, my "Without Portfolio" remained on my transcript until I was accepted into the Art Education program. I did follow the guidelines this time. I came up with a very strong portfolio. I had a substantial amount of artwork to show then. So "Without Portfolio" is gone now from my transcript, and that was important.</p> <p>But I would have never walked away though. See, when you get a census, they ask you, "What's your parents' highest degree of education?" I want to have my kids be able to "check" their Mom had a "university education." So, I kind of did it for them, but also for myself, because now I can say, "Highest Education? Yes. University."</p> <p>Too, when I was a young student, I was actually discouraged from doing art. So I didn't. Yet after many years, I still wanted to pursue art...So, that was also part of my returning to university, to fulfill a long held dream of many, many years. Women of a certain age feel the need for permission to do stuff like make art, and not just continue to just clean the house or do traditional female things!</p>

ROSEMARY	<p>I paid for university from my pay cheque, strictly semester-by-semester. I didn't come from CEGEP, when I returned to university; I had to do the first level Drawing and Painting classes. I'm actually glad, because I had some amazing instructors. So it's good.</p> <p>I found some of the drawing classes hard when we had to stand in front of a piece of newsprint for four hours. Doing this at the end of the day was a challenge.</p> <p>Yes, the commute was difficult, and travel ate into my time. Not living close to school, I took public transit downtown, and again, at night I took the metro and then had to catch a bus. It's a huge commitment. It could be a good 2 hours each way, depending if it was a stormy night in the winter. Then, you come home at midnight after classes that could go to 10:30 at night. Oh my god! There were many times I wanted to quit. Many times! I'd be sitting on a bus, saying, 'What the heck am I doing here? Why am I not sleeping like the rest of the universe is right now? Yeah. But I didn't quit. I'm glad</p> <p>But in the summer, I actually loved coming downtown for classes. It wasn't that much of a chore to take day classes. It was a pleasure. Good times.</p> <p>I am a lifelong learner. That is one thing I live for, to learn something new, try it out, check it out.</p> <p>But, knowing it and practicing, or doing it, are two different things. So, all of this aids my motivation in being a teacher.</p> <p>If somebody in your classroom, and hopefully there is a few of them, actually has some teaching experience, build on that. Use their experience, invite them to reflect. Was their method of teaching effective? How? If not, here's the opportunity to make some changes.</p> <p>That's the beauty of the practicums, yes. But also, get that started in the art education classroom.</p> <p>It's actually a big topic when you start to think about what's going on with learners. Of course, you can't see what's in their head. You can only go from external cues. It is interesting to observe, because that helps in being a teacher</p> <p>I think adult or mature learners are more patient than younger students. Adults don't have to have the end result or solution right away. I find that my son and this generation are very impatient. They want things right away, whatever it might be.</p> <p>Many mature learners are much more willing to work over a longer period. I think they are more content and interested in the process. It's a slower arrival at destination.</p>
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ROSEMARY	<p>There is a love for education. That's what's kept me going all along. Everything that I got when I attended class, was very rewarding for me, and for tomorrow, and the next day. I'm very happy about education.</p> <p>But I think I would still choose to go part-time, because taking a studio class, you really want to give it all of your focus. And art education practicum really eats up your time because I like to prepare as much as I can. I do a lot of planning, examples, so yeah, it takes a lot of time. So I think, still, I would choose part-time only.</p>
CHARLOTTE	<p>When he went to school, I talked to the school principal at the private school. I suggested a program where they can do something vocational, more hands on, you know? She said, "Go ahead!" I developed the program that this is now what it is.</p> <p>I created a program in order to give real life experiences. This way, I can learn about my student and see what the problem is. I gain a whole picture of the whole person. What is the problem? Why this child does not know this? What keeps him from knowing this? Why can't he learn this? I mean, a disability or not, there is a reason students can't do something: is it because there are no actual real life experiences?</p> <p>But, you have to have it in your heart, your whole body. When I'm teaching, I'm doing, talking, making. I laugh, I cry, I joke with the kids.</p> <p>This whole thing evolved into something much bigger than I had really even thought possible and exploded into a whole architectural, biology course! What made me happy to be a teacher was, the kids taught me where this can go. They were the designer of my lesson plan. That's how I like to have it, to have my students tell me what they need, or what they want to learn; it's interest based.</p> <p>I had one <i>stage</i> working with immigrant children, and had just learned printmaking. I was excited about it and told them that I'm not really great at it yet, but we can all learn together.</p> <p>The 21<sup>st</sup> century has arrived. But the education hasn't.</p> <p>You come into a classroom, and you can take that lesson plan and shove it up your god knows what! Paper doesn't talk back, but students do. They might have other interests. If you don't get them interested in what you want, or only because you want them to, that's your first mistake. You need to have a student-based interest. That's how you capture them. From there they fly</p>

CHARLOTTE	<p>Then make sure that there is a progression of learning. That is what you encourage and support in any way you can. When they get into a snag, its, "We are in this together." It has to be a relationship.</p> <p>To some professors I want to say: "Get your head out of your ass and teach! Look around you!..." (re: <i>why teachers are quitting</i>) Because they are completely stressed, because universities did not prepare them for reality! That's what I learned: nothing is in place to prepare them for reality.</p> <p>Instead (<i>of taking my son to a speech pathologist</i>) I focused on his little being. I invested time into my kids, and we went traveling. So, my teaching metaphor came from this. You never know which students you get. It will always be a challenge, and something new. You learn these things traveling. I met new people, asked them things, and learned...My boys would go and explore, a natural occurrence in their learning</p> <p>It's like you can think all you want, but you have to be in the situation, and work it out.</p> <p>I want to be an art educator, because life is art.</p> <p>Like back to essential learning and what we need to know as humans, which make us human; to relate to our own feelings, to what is around us. You can do that through art. If you connect it to something real, then it loses the abstract. In education you have to somehow present in a real life experience. You look at the stages of the learning process, or, the human being. First you have to learn certain things, but we learn at different paces.</p> <p>You will have to learn how to adapt.</p>
CINDY	<p>For me, undertaking a degree was the realization of a long-held dream, but upon returning to university, I encountered a new world.</p> <p>Now we had moved to an apartment to attend university in Montreal, sold our car, and took a bus or the metro to school—a far cry from small rural towns where we had spent most of our years.</p> <p>I was interested, fascinated by, and cherished that which was new and enlightening. It was a privileged space for me</p> <p>To be on my own was truly frightening. I felt like such an anomaly. Yet I knew I was beginning to think differently.</p> <p>During this time, process fed my soul with meaning and on the difficult days, I reminded myself that education was also a means of personal fulfillment</p> <p>I had to keep walking, trusting, and working. Hard.</p>

Theme	VALUES: <i>Judgments of what is important or worth, or principles guiding the mature learners experience in university.</i>
Sub-Theme #2	Making a difference: Purpose, generativity, recognition in life and society
ROB	<p>That being said, I have lots to prove, yet I have nothing to prove, because I don't need to create a life, I already have my life, and I'm not going to have more children; I can just totally devote whatever years I'm allowed, to do this.</p> <p>I don't need to earn a fantastic living. But, to make a difference is important. I will see where it goes from there. I don't know if I will necessarily settle into one thing and just ride out into the sunset. I don't know if that's necessary.</p> <p>(re: his children) They will understand some of the challenges and the rewards, in time; especially when they go through the similar journey.</p> <p>People are in awe of me to be in school. The 'wow' factor is good. I guess that's the reward and the fun end of it; not so much that I'm in university, but I'm challenging people to think beyond where they are right now, no matter what they are doing.</p> <p>Someday this will be a memory, and my life will be but a story I am telling. It is hard not be simply anxious to arrive at the destination, but that is not what it is about. It started as a journey and will continue as one as long as I have breath.</p> <p>I don't need 100 jobs. I just need one. If I believe that there's a purpose to this, then I'm not concerned. I really don't think about work and things like that.</p> <p>I know this experience will affect who I am as a teacher. I have experience in the real world. I just think I am going to approach things differently, because I've lived in a world that maybe demanded way too much. Certain things have to be done. Don't make it into its own world, because it just begins to drag you down.</p> <p>My relation to parents will be interesting.</p> <p>A man's input is critical for girls and boys; many don't have it and need it.</p>

ROB	<p>The three goals of education are 'qualification' and 'instruction,' but the third goal, which is actually the first goal in the list, is 'socialization.' So somewhere along the line, we should be socializing. It means connecting. For what purpose? To create a better community, fit better into society, to be a more functioning, better, citizen.</p> <p>But, I think more mature students will be attending university to pursue meaningful changes. Our level of health is higher, so life expectancy is getting longer. In the next 30 years, retirement won't be considered as in the past. Those who have retired early don't necessarily age well. I don't know that there's a benefit of seeking the goal of retirement. There may be truth in that being busy, active, needed, and having your mind stimulated, keeps us healthy.</p>
ROSEMARY	<p>I knew I wanted a career change at some point, so it was a goal to teach part-time. But after a certain point at university, I figured this would be my job. I like the art world. I like the creative aspect to it. So it hits all bases. You can surround yourself with beauty and have power of doing that. You can change your world. Art is very powerful!</p> <p>Returning to university has given me a lot of confidence. There's something about getting permission in life to do the things we want to do, and this is very often the case for women. . Women of a certain age feel the need for permission to do stuff like make art, and not just continue to just clean the house or do traditional female things!</p> <p>I feel recognized, more aware of who I am. (now that she has a diploma)</p> <p>This was something that I just didn't want to pursue anymore. I wanted still more, I don't know. Not to be sheltered, but more direction at that point. I really didn't feel as though my three paintings were going to be it for me.</p> <p>I think I can teach a little more differently. This has actually helped me differentiate myself from other teachers, because I'm actually taking teaching in a different direction. If someone's shopping for a teacher and wants somebody who is going to push them differently, then they are going to want to come to my class. So yeah, there is a difference.</p> <p>I hope to give adults most of all skills that perhaps they have, but don't realize. The technical. I focus mainly on the technical, and that's what differentiates me. The technical could be taught, but the creativity, it comes from within. Sometimes you don't have the tools, and so the creativity will never come out. If somebody really wants to paint, and really wants to draw, focus a little on the technique for a change. In this way too, mature students contribute to a university classroom. They are equipped with a worldview and have experience and information, so they put things into context quickly, based on just things taken in over the years.</p>

ROSEMARY	
CHARLOTTE	<p>I firmly believe in an education approach where students learn about life and so go out into the real world</p> <p>I am a teacher and there is an obligation when you become a teacher. This is what I realize in my “old age.” I want to have a purposeful profession. I want meaning in that. This education is a lot of money and comes with an obligation to serve students in their best interest. If I cannot do that, I have no business being a teacher. If I cannot promise myself I can do the job, then I better stay away from it. That’s what made me think I could never adhere to the MELS program. They would kick me out! I admit I am a total anarchist when it comes to education. I’m not throwing bombs, but my opinion.</p> <p>The only reason I’m sitting here is because I need this goddamn certificate, so I can continue what I’ve been doing--what I love!</p> <p>I like to help people understand things.</p> <p>There needs to be at least one course that specifically accommodates Art Education for Special Needs.</p> <p>I realized I don’t want to teach art within the school system. I’d rather be a Community Art Teacher and have fun, and give this fun to the kids, while they are expanding their knowledge about the world. Art is essential. It brings people together. It’s a mirror of our times, reflecting what is going on, and makes us think.</p>
CINDY	<p>With my children now out of the house, at least most of the time, I felt an inner hunger to grow, to learn new skills, and to contribute to others in new ways</p> <p>I was in a liminal space wherein my passion for meaning had not ended, but needed expanding. I had a desire to grow and learn and find my place in society, and therein contribute in new ways.</p>
Theme	VALUES: Judgments of what is important or worth, or principles guiding the mature learners experience in university.
Sub-Theme #3	Authenticity: Truthfulness, genuineness, being responsible
ROB	<p>“Teach Beyond” is the title of my journal I kept over the course of this first year at school.</p> <p>I have always considered myself to be creative, but have always made a very clear exception to that rule: art. Yet, I had to just go forward.</p>



ROB	<p>I'm not in that particular little group. I could ask "Could I be in the loop?" but I feel like I would be "free loading" to do that.</p> <p>Rather than memorizing specific terms, I remember meaning, application, or the practical use of something. I won't know the <i>term</i>, and that may or may not be important. I guess if you are talking amongst scholars, but talking to a parent, or understanding a child, I think that's more important than the terms.</p> <p>If I was a director of the program, I would want to sit with me because I'd give an unfiltered, uncensored opinion and perspective on things. I'm not nervous about saying something, and maybe they didn't realize something they are doing doesn't make sense.</p> <p>I would also change the marking system. Whatever mark you get, that would be your exact mark; not an 89.7% or a 90.1%. You are fighting for and earning every mark you get, and then they just remove 5% from you with no justification? There's no reason. The GPA absolutely makes no sense! It's frustrating too, because I have no idea what I get on my final exams. It's worth something! I know what mark I got for the course, but I don't know if they are honest with me. Do they push your grade up or down depending on having too many high marks? That happens!</p> <p>I guess I am learning more of who I am, what has perhaps always existed, but never realized.</p> <p>I know this experience will affect who I am as a teacher. I have experience in the real world. I just think I am going to approach things differently, because I've lived in a world that maybe demanded way too much. Certain things have to be done...My relation to parents will be interesting.</p> <p>Once I asked my Psychology teacher a question. She's very smart. She looked at me like, "How can you be so stupid?" That's what it felt like. I was to write a paper and include a certain concept, but I didn't understand the term. She looked at me like, "How can you not know?" And I had no idea. I said, "Trust me, I need your help right now, but I will be able to succeed on my own and move further away." That is actually 'The Zone of Proximal Development,' or something like that, which means: "I need your help right now. You are the expert. I'm going to stay close to you. You'll teach me. Then I'll move away, and I'll do it by myself." A lot of people learn that way. I just needed to understand.</p>
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ROB	<p>I can't do an "all-nighter," and rarely work past 8:00 pm; I don't want to either. I can't. I'm tired. I get up at 5:00 each morning.</p> <p>My only concerns are how to balance work and family.</p> <p>This summer, I'm playing on an even playing field. I'm taking only one course and everyone else in class is working summer jobs... I'll probably get a very good mark in it. They say, "I have to get up tomorrow and work." I say, "Well that's good!"</p> <p>We all have our fears, mature learners who have been away from school for a long time, and young students who have never left.</p>
ROSEMARY	<p>My first attempt to return to university was a BA program in English, at McMaster's University. I couldn't keep going because my kids were too young. I just dropped it for 15 years.</p> <p>I don't take on things where I feel as though I can be rejected. Usually I am conservative and try to take on challenges where I have some margin of winning, right? And, uh, that was a shocker for me, because hey, I thought, my portfolio was okay. I had already exhibited some of what I submitted. But sure enough, it wasn't.</p> <p>I had had a discussion with a Painting professor regarding an Independent Study course... I was told I only had to produce three paintings... That's a long period of time to be without much coaching, and then to get critiqued... I wanted still more, I don't know.</p> <p>Having some life experience in art education class was helpful. A mature learner has been exposed to so much in life already.</p> <p>Wouldn't it be revealing if professors had a video recording of themselves talking about readings, and the class is sitting there on i-phones, talking with their girlfriend, and not paying attention? I mean, what a revelation! It is a really sad thing to have a teacher teaching these kinds of sessions.</p> <p>You would think the professors should be more attentive and aware that this happening in the class. We see it. It's out there. Mature students see problems, especially if teaching is not effective.</p> <p>I am not sure how readings can be presented better, but somehow that really needs to be addressed.</p> <p>I accumulated 3 more credits than needed, but finished almost "on the nose."</p> <p>I've evolved as a teacher since I started Art Education. I think a lot about what I can use to teach my students. My teaching is influenced by my own learning</p>
	<p>preference. I'm very interested in all the aspects of the artistic process and the materials, to sort of get the full picture.</p>

ROSEMARY	<p>I also try and encourage the human aspect of connection to art. And it's important to give students a dialogue. And like we were asked to include in our lesson plan, the vocabulary is important. Most of all, I value a student-centered environment.</p> <p>I always made a point of having my homework done so that even if I were to walk into a critique that was already started, I could put my stuff up immediately. I could merge in an ongoing critique and participate right away.</p> <p>Before returning to university, I had already been taking community watercolor classes nearby. I was on the executive of an artist organization, doing publicity and volunteering. I was also exhibiting my paintings at least twice a year. So my art making was starting to take off, but only in one medium: watercolor. I started to get frustrated in the local community classes. They were often done in an instructor's home, and the people around me, I could tell, weren't that serious about making art. Painting was more a past time, a hobby, not to really take on and experience it more... That was really the impetus for me to take on coming back to University.</p> <p>I believe what keeps me engaged is partly my love for learning. That's probably number one.</p> <p>If you think you are going to go out and teach, how are you going to incite an excitement about learning if you, as a student, aren't excited about your own learning <i>ie</i>: have your class work done? I mean that's ridiculous!</p> <p>One thing that really annoyed me was that a lot of professors have never been to any of the practicum sites before. They should go and have a look around and see what students are up against. In some places, students have to build a classroom essentially from nothing. And that is a huge challenge. You have to create a learning environment, and a lot of people aren't prepared for that. I think they should have more discussion about that in the early classes. You know, maybe have a former student come in and talk about their experience. There is need of this support and instruction.</p> <p>I always felt it was important if I could at least do something good in the class, meet at least the basic expectations of professors, and have my work done on time. I could see, for whatever reason, that some of the young students couldn't, or wouldn't, do that.</p>
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ROSEMARY	<p>To have a healthy attitude towards your schoolwork is very important in Art Education. Mature learners can serve as examples for what students will experience out in the teaching environment. For instance, if they observe a mature learner, their behavior and what interests them, it can help in teaching future students.</p> <p>In the Art Education setting, where a series of presentations are done, every student could be filmed for a few minutes, and then critique themselves. They would see the technical and theory personified. You could give people the option to take part or not. I definitely would have been interested in having myself videotaped. It could be pleasantly surprising and encouraging as well!</p> <p>I found, in a lot of cases, the information was too common sense, or it didn't really inspire me. Not Paulo Freire, his stuff is excellent. But I just found that the readings in the Art Ed classes were just not that great. Most of the papers that I read were actually very logical. There weren't many concepts that were difficult to understand. If you had some life learning, it was straight forward.</p> <p>The readings are a dry, dry thing. To add something would help. Oh, and half the time, we didn't even talk about an article. Why bother assigning it? These are the teachers of tomorrow!</p> <p>Also, I would like to have had more of a formal introduction on how to teach seniors and fragile populations, because I don't have much experience with programming for these people. It's actually ironic, because in a lot of cases, students were farmed out to these fragile population centers for practicums, and did not have any formal training on how to support these people. There is a need to discuss working with these populations. Perhaps get some pointers and get some tools going? A mental health worker came in and did a one-time lecture, but I found it didn't sink into me. I believe it could have been done in a better way with some research and examples that we could reflect on. It's just one thing I felt lacking in. The Minor program must include this kind of teaching.</p> <p>Other than that, Art Education has been a good experience. As a mature student. I would certainly encourage any mature adult to go for it. There's a difference being a mature student going to school, as compared to being a 20 year old.</p> <p>Often, the mature student will know as much as the professor, or even more, depending on what it is that is being taught. It is a bit of a freaky thing. It could be intimidating for the instructor, and the student even, because you are moving away from this safe place with a single leader in the classroom now. You've got two leaders, or three leaders. So it potentially could be a power struggle certainly, depending. In most cases, mature learners are respectful of that, so therefore they don't exert themselves.</p>
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ROSEMARY	<p>I think adult or mature learners are more patient than younger students. Adults don't have to have the end result or solution right away. I find that my son and this generation are very impatient. They want things right away, whatever it might be. Many mature learners are much more willing to work over a longer period. I think they are more content and interested in the process. It's a slower arrival at destination.</p> <p>...In this way too, mature students contribute to a university classroom. They are equipped with a worldview and have experience and information, so they put things into context quickly, based on just things taken in over the years. I think that's good, because then they can move on to what it is that they are supposed to be doing.</p> <p>In the Art Education setting, where a series of presentations are done, every student could be filmed for a few minutes, and then critique themselves. They would see the technical and theory personified. You could give people the option to take part or not. I definitely would have been interested in having myself videotaped.</p>
CHARLOTTE	<p>I have been teaching for 17 years in a private school. I came to university to become a certified art teacher in the public school system, which is now required for my job.</p> <p>I work and have to make a living. I took a huge financial loss; I don't have parents or loans. So, I don't have all the time in the world!</p> <p>I started teaching when 21 years old, and I'm still teaching. I always considered what came to me naturally, how I learn and how does the student learn. I show them a way that helps me, and maybe it can help them. Most students come up with their own method of learning. But there will always be a time when, "I can't get this." I listen to them and say, "Okay, how can we make you get this, cause you really want it, otherwise you wouldn't be here."</p> <p>I don't know how to explain it, but it frustrates me to no end that a person thinks just because you have an academic achievement, they know everything. When you aren't listening, you actually potentially hinder students to learn something valuable from a person that has been there.</p> <p>I'm 52 years old. I'm not an idiot! I've been doing this for 17 years. Couldn't you just listen to me? I eventually wrote lessons and they were about 60 pages long. Each! Absolutely, totally, and utterly ridiculous!</p>

CHARLOTTE	<p>Lining up helps them transition from one program to another. The entire school does this! My supervising staff of 17 years even tried to explain to my university evaluator that we do these things in the school. It's a good thing because had that happened to somebody else, they would have been devastated. I had the experience and knew my school's policies. Yet, I was to teach as to regular kids.</p> <p>I always felt like I was rushing these kids for my grades, you know? So I've figured out this is not my world.</p> <p>I didn't expect this. When I came to university and saw all these lesson plans, and a lot of that stuff that went on, I thought, "It's not my philosophy. This is not where I can be useful."</p> <p>I admit I am a total anarchist when it comes to education. I'm not throwing bombs, but my opinion. I'm a mother and my teaching philosophy has stayed with me to this day! This is what I know.</p> <p>Coming to university I thought was the best way to continue my career. I love teaching. I did finish my degree, but the university education is in conflict with my teaching philosophy.</p> <p>I wanted my certification as an art teacher to help me stay at my job.</p> <p>Just look at what we value now? Conformity, no thinking, and keep to the rules, to keep people in-line, make money, and to keep the system going, and we climb this little pre-made ladder. People who don't, like me, are called idiots and imbeciles, a true description. From Latin to English, "idiot" is "the one who thinks for himself." And, "imbecile" comes from "becile" meaning "cane," and the negation, "im." So, "the person who walks without a cane." These people don't need the support of the hierarchy, the powers to be, which isn't always a good thing. In light of what I've experience in formal education, I would rather walk without a cane!</p>
CINDY	<p>I was thankful for being a stay-at-home mom for twenty-five years.</p> <p>My sheltered, religious background and the female roles modeled did not prepare me for the world outside the home, or one of independence.</p> <p>In my first year I devoted much more time to reading and assignments than was seemingly expected in my courses...</p>

CINDY	<p>I wanted to learn, and knew the satisfaction of doing my best, and I attached my worth and capability to my grades.</p> <p>...I was driven by perfectionism. Despite my good grades, I often cried in my first year, believing I could not write, have any opinion, nor form one, let alone complete an assignment with sufficient quality.</p> <p>To return to what I left was unthinkable. But I often wondered: Was I capable of being a successful student, and if so, to actually teach? Did I, or would I, offer anything? Maybe I was too old?</p> <p>I struggle with fear and lack of confidence, my old baggage. My divided heart made me slower. Perfectionism drove me to focus on outcomes.</p> <p>I have been humbled and surprised by my own potential and the possibilities of learning. I have learned over the last years that my work reflects a distinct quality, because I do care deeply about learning and contributing to a new world of my making in art education, and I do continue to learn from the world I have had.</p> <p>This experience of returning to learning has challenged me to interrogate what I had believed, what I do believe, and what I hoped for, or more simply, what I had learned, accepted and rejected in the course of coming to know.</p>
Theme	CHALLENGES: Difficulties and /or oppositions in the mature learner's university experience
Sub-Theme #1	Learning to learn: learning the academic protocol, adjustment to learning, found missing
ROB	<p>This last week this kid said, "What the fuck is that?" I said, "That should be my T-shirt!" because everything I see, I say that. I have no idea. My whole life is that right now.</p> <p>...I ran into my first class, but I was in the wrong classroom because they switched my class and I had no idea how to have known that. Or, when a teacher said, "You know, I like Moodle." I thought, "Moodle? What is Moodle?" And, like you don't want to put up your hand. But people caught on a bit with me, that these things were new to me.</p> <p>So my first semester was insanely pathetic. I was just learning how to learn. I couldn't really focus on any schoolwork until I learned how to do school; what I had to do to do it. Like everything. Everything.</p>

ROB	<p>What's the best way to take notes? Just how to organize yourself?</p> <p>I had no idea how to hand in a paper. I could write it, but there's a definite pattern to success in education. It's an unfortunate pattern, because it's a pattern based on regurgitation. If you're strong in memory, you have probably, a 75% going in. The other is tweaking it and giving it back. I keep a copy of my midterm paper from my first English course. The teacher had ripped it apart, but I have kept it as a template for all my papers.</p> <p>I'm realizing now, I am smart. And I'm not any smarter necessarily today than I was last year. I have different knowledge. I've learned how to learn, but my core intelligence has not shifted. What I had going in, I have now... Or, maybe it's the fact that I'm understanding how to learn. The second semester was by far easier than the first, because I didn't spend the first month panicked.</p> <p>Regarding university programming, I had an issue with course selection. You are to pick five courses for the semester. You go in to register, but find out they are all full because those who have more credits register ahead of you.</p>
ROSEMARY	<p>So I applied, but I got rejected the first time because my portfolio didn't comply. I was working during the days when they offered portfolio-coaching sessions. I said, "I'm not going to take this!" And, uh, that was a shocker for me, because hey, I thought, my portfolio was okay. I had already exhibited some of what I submitted. But sure enough, it wasn't.</p> <p>So, anyway, my "Without Portfolio" remained on my transcript until I was accepted into the Art Education program. I did follow the guidelines this time. I came up with a very strong portfolio.</p> <p>When I first returned to university it was difficult, because my sons were a lot younger. Taking studio classes, I needed space to work. I'm the type of person that I really didn't like working downtown in the spaces that were given to us. They were crowded, and to bring all your paraphernalia along and to try and create a workspace, I found that it was hugely challenging..</p> <p>So in the first few years I did most of my work at home, even though I didn't really have a studio space to work in at home I didn't come from CEGEP, when I returned to university; I had to do the first level Drawing and Painting classes.</p>



ROSEMARY	<p>It was a bit of a shock for me, because these classes did not teach a traditional method of painting and drawing. The professor's approach was of a conceptual nature, and not focused on getting the tools and skills training. I did adapt and it was okay.</p> <p>As a mature student, my days were long. Being in the part-time program, we were always the last ones to register; therefore, I was always in night school. I'm glad those days are over for night school, I really am. I was late coming from the West Island. There is traffic, and it was particularly hard in the winter. But luckily the instructors were fairly understanding. I always made a point of having my homework done so that even if I were to walk into a critique that was already started, I could put my stuff up immediately. I could merge in an ongoing critique and participate right away. But, I found some of the drawing classes hard when we had to stand in front of a piece of newsprint for four hours. Doing this at the end of the day was a challenge.</p> <p>I've evolved as a teacher since I started Art Education. I think a lot about what I can use to teach my students. My teaching is influenced by my own learning preference. I'm very interested in all the aspects of the artistic process and the materials, to sort of get the full picture.</p> <p>I got criticized in my Art Ed for actually introducing the technical aspects of art. The criticism was, "Well, we can get this off the Internet."... But, knowing it and practicing, or doing it, are two different things. So, all of this aids my motivation in being a teacher.</p> <p>I like to be able to put art into a context in different ways – the historical, the materials, the process, what's behind it, the worldview, etcetera. Knowing this information adds to appreciation. To take in the Art History, take on the worldview of what's going on at that time, say around Matisse, and so understand where he drew his ideas from, adults relate to that. And so, I transfer much of my experience at university to my teaching of mature students. The focus really with the adult learners is the learning part. Mature students know why they are there. So, I have learned that the best way mature learners learn, or a main aspect, is to trigger something in them.</p> <p>I believe what keeps me engaged is partly my love for learning.</p> <p>That's probably number one... Teachers can't forget that students are leaders at the same time. Teachers have to be aware that the "boss dynamic" has to be fueled, encouraged, and challenged in their classrooms.</p>
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ROSEMARY	<p>Often times, I didn't think that this was covered in the Art Education classes. It's a huge responsibility to grow and to take on a community center, all the programming, all the classroom set-up and planning, all the materials, getting that done. Then also, the course outline, some bureaucracy, sometimes fund-raising, depending. I mean it's huge! It's a big challenge to maintain that.</p> <p>If you think you are going to go out and teach, how are you going to incite an excitement about learning if you, as a student, aren't excited about your own learning <i>ie</i>: have your class work done?</p> <p>One thing that really annoyed me was that a lot of professors have never been to any of the practicum sites before. They should go and have a look around and see what students are up against. In some places, students have to build a classroom essentially from nothing. And that is a huge challenge. You have to create a learning environment, and a lot of people aren't prepared for that.</p> <p>Having some life experience in art education class was helpful. A mature learner has been exposed to so much in life already. I see things changing. People are getting more internalized. I've sat in so many classrooms where a professor has tried to get a discussion going and students are not saying anything. They are texting or they are writing in their books, but they don't have their heads up so clearly there is a lack of interest there.</p> <p>That bothered me when was sitting in an Art Ed class. Nobody is paying attention! That's disgusting! These are teachers! These are teachers sitting with a teacher! That should be the ultimate exchange type of environment!</p> <p>You would think the professors should be more attentive and aware that this happening in the class... Situations where a certain problem is happening a lot may point to the professor's approach. If this is the case, they have to change it, because they are wasting their time if the students are just sitting there and not engaging. There's seems to be a lot of time spent on the peripherals, the theory or other aspects of teaching that are important, but the enactment, the performance, the relational, and the doing needs to be taught. We see it. It's out there.</p> <p>Sometimes, when readings would be assigned and reviewed in class, there was a lot of silence. Maybe students didn't read them, they just don't know how to talk about them, or they weren't challenging enough.</p> <p>I found, in a lot of cases, the information was too common sense, or it didn't really inspire me.</p>
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ROSEMARY	<p>But I just found that the readings in the Art Ed classes were just not that great.</p> <p>So, how do you present it back in the classroom? I don't think that was done very successfully. The responsibility should have been put back on the students perhaps, to prepare something in a presentation back to the class. So this gives a teaching opportunity; students will explore their teaching skills.</p> <p>The readings are a dry, dry thing. To add something would help. Oh, and half the time, we didn't even talk about an article. Why bother assigning it? These are the teachers of tomorrow!</p> <p>Also, there was very little on the therapy aspect of teaching, which would be useful and worth knowing, in helping a blocked artist. To implement some therapeutic stuff would have been helpful.</p> <p>Also, I would like to have had more of a formal introduction on how to teach seniors and fragile populations, because I don't have much experience with programming for these people. It's actually ironic, because in a lot of cases, students were farmed out to these fragile population centers for practicums, and did not have any formal training on how to support these people.</p> <p>A mental health worker came in and did a one-time lecture, but I found it didn't sink into me. I believe it could have been done in a better way with some research and examples that we could reflect on. It's just one thing I felt lacking in. The Minor program must include this kind of teaching.</p> <p>The most common problem I find now, working with adults, is that they're blocked artists. The Art Education Minor did not require specific classes on adult learning... It's a very good market coming up. But, there are always going to be people who are not as well off physically. It would be good to know how to teach them in a special way.</p> <p>As a mature student. I would certainly encourage any mature adult to go for it. There's a difference being a mature student going to school, as compared to being a 20 year old. Most of my instructors were my age, or a bit older, so I always felt like a peer to them. I felt always comfortable, at least for that. Often, the mature student will know as much as the professor, or even more, depending on what it is that is being taught. It is a bit of a freaky thing.</p>
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ROSEMARY	<p>But, being with different ages is helpful, because you get to see up close what they are interested in, what triggers their learning. I prefer this diverse setting. They've got good energy, these kids. It's actually a big topic when you start to think about what's going on with learners.</p> <p>I always felt it was important if I could at least do something good in the class, meet at least the basic expectations of professors, and have my work done on time.</p> <p>...a love for education. That's what's kept me going all along. Everything that I got when I attended class, was very rewarding for me, and for tomorrow, and the next day. I'm very happy about education.</p> <p>I would still choose to go part-time, because taking a studio class, you really want to give it all of your focus. And art education practicum really eats up your time because I like to prepare as much as I can. I do a lot of planning, examples, so yeah, it takes a lot of time.</p> <p>I'm talking about presentation skills, gesturing, and relaying an idea. There is a performance aspect to teaching, and that's something that nobody deals with really here in university.</p>
CHARLOTTE	<p>In the first few courses of the program, to me, the profs were horrendous and I felt like, "God! I hope I survive this. Do I have the patience to endure this? Do I really, really have to endure this?"</p> <p>...I can empathize with every person that has problems learning in our society and designed education system. It needs to change. There is no holistic view, no collaboration and people are totally disconnected. If I cannot connect, I'm not going to study any more than I have to.</p> <p>Teachers should listen to their students. Cause what is your end game? To have students succeed? Or, is it, "Here's my little formula: I see all the answers; this is right, this is right, and I'm done." Honey, you get paid to teach!... But teachers who think they know everything, and don't want to hear anything from students? This is the worst thing you can do, because you don't let anybody share. I'd raise my hand and would automatically be ignored.</p> <p>...it was all about a lesson plan. What for? You come into a classroom, and you can take that lesson plan and shove it up your god knows what! Paper doesn't talk back, but students do.</p> <p>It's not: you are in a power position and now I must listen. This is not how to teach. This is not a good prof, but the worst, if you let people teach like that.</p>
CHARLOTTE	<p>I didn't expect this. When I came to university and saw all these lesson plans, and a lot of that stuff that went on, I thought, "It's not my philosophy."</p>

	<p>The program needs to consider we are working with human beings who are always moving, loving, talking, arguing, and learning from mistakes. As a teacher, I need to be continuously connecting with our students.</p> <p>Just look at what we value now? Conformity, no thinking, and keep to the rules, to keep people in-line, make money, and to keep the system going, and we climb this little pre-made ladder.</p>
CINDY	<p>Basic skills needed to be learned, such as how to use technology, to speak up and ask questions in class, not a skill that was reinforced when I was last in school.</p> <p>This was not an easy change for us, or our sons. When they visited or returned for any extended time, our family routines conjured me to return to the rhythms of my mothering role, despite the fact I had assignments and projects to do.</p> <p>I also quickly realized the challenges that I would face... The younger generation had already developed training...I was in an environment where younger people knew more than I did, were quicker, and had better minds and memory.</p> <p>In my first year I devoted much more time to reading and assignments than was seemingly expected in my courses, in part because I was interested in, fascinated by, and cherished that which was new and enlightening. It was a privileged space for me and I was driven by perfectionism. Despite my good grades, I often cried in my first year, believing I could not write, have any opinion, nor form one, let alone complete an assignment with sufficient quality.</p> <p>...I required much more time to read and do assignments than the time given, and I struggled with the belief that being older, I should do well, if not better, than younger students.</p>

Theme	CHALLENGES: Difficulties and/or oppositions in the mature learner's university experience
Subtheme #2	Life experience: Unrecognized
ROB	<p>But, they could use mature students more in university, especially in classes. Give us a platform to express ourselves, because it is different. I mean, I agree and disagree that credits are credits and you have to earn them, but I look at the ridiculousness of registering for the course, "Communicating with Parents." The lady in charge says, "No, you don't have enough credits for that." I think, "My word! I think I had three children!" They've gone through almost all elementary school and high school, you know? But I can't take it.</p> <p>Life experience is not considered.</p> <p>If I could change one thing: give me 30 credits or quarter of a century. Or at least let me take the course "Communication with Parents" without 30 credits!</p> <p>I mean I could give more to the classes I am in because I had life experiences. I view things differently, just as I benefit from those around me, and there is more of them.</p> <p>We don't try to understand who's sitting beside you, who has a whole lot of experience, lacks in a lot of things for sure, but in other things, a wealth of experience. Teachers don't have time for it, but it's unfortunate. There are opportunities that are missed. Only a handful of people have asked anything about my life, you know? And I'm not saying it's critical, but I just think it adds an insight; it adds a different level.</p> <p>I am privileged to have access to this education. Yet, schools must continue to change. Universities have to realize time is valuable for the mature student. I can't waste time. In business we say, "Be easy to do business with!" Well, I am the client and I'm asked to give information, and to take certain courses. Then I'm told, I can't have anything. Facilitate my life so when I'm finished, I'm in control and can give back. Again, the situation was frustrating enough that I thought of leaving. You can't just say, "Well, that's the rule, so that's just the way it is." There is also exception to the rule. I think you still have to view an individual as an individual. You have to realize that I don't have the same responsibilities in terms of school. I know I don't get an extra 'handicap' mark just because I'm busy, but they could work with my schedule.</p>
ROSEMARY	They accepted me as a "mature student," but officially I was listed as, "Without a Portfolio." So, for the longest time it stated that on my

ROSEMARY	<p>transcripts. Adding to this, I had to do additional credits, for the 'Mature Entry Program.' I came with my credits from McMaster University, but only 6 credits were accepted.</p> <p>I didn't come from CEGEP, when I returned to university; I had to do the first level Drawing and Painting classes.</p> <p>Learning should be peer to peer, in many ways. If somebody in your classroom, and hopefully there is a few of them, actually has some teaching experience, build on that. Use their experience, invite them to reflect. Was their method of teaching effective? How? If not, here's the opportunity to make some changes.</p>
CHARLOTTE	<p>In university, some teachers wouldn't allow me to talk about special needs. I never could say anything! I have more experience, even though they may have graduate degree. I have degrees in other studies, I've worked, and I've got the degree of life. It's all backwards. I don't know how to explain it, but it frustrates me to no end that a person thinks just because you have an academic achievement, they know everything. When you aren't listening, you actually potentially hinder students to learn something valuable from a person that has been there.</p> <p>The age category that I am in is like a special need, in a sense. I have experience. I lived. I've been around the block a few times, and have 25 more years more experience than most of the average teachers and students. So, they might want to consider this.</p> <p>The worse time, I totally dismissed the teacher, and just had to say, "You know what? You don't know what you are talking about. Good luck!" I believe that a teacher like this should never, ever teach a mature student. I only felt condescension and arrogance. This can cause mature students to feel very insecure and feel, "Oh my god, this is beyond me. I'm too old, too late!"</p> <p>I'm now more diligent about having IEP's for mature students. And, mature learners need to be respected and incorporated into the classroom. I think I'm a much better student now that I'm older, because I know a lot more. I am not the 20 year old that just came from CEGEP, trying to find her way. I know what I'm doing. I've been there.</p> <p>I was criticized for my teaching method. I have been doing this for many years. My expertise was not considered. I have more experience than most will ever have with this population. Let me make my decisions in the classroom; I know what I'm doing!</p> <p>I had the experience and knew my school's policies. Yet, I was to teach as to regular kids. I was watched for a half hour, told I was wrong in my approach, and failed my practicum.</p> <p>They could come and see my program. See me teach. I developed a program. Would you look at it? Would you read it, then come and observe? Everything they want is there.</p>

CHARLOTTE	<p>This is what I know. This is what I am. And, I've lived this long and I don't have 10 hours a week to spend on an elaborate metaphor crafty thing... I have put effort in a working program that actually exists. And my little artwork is not good enough for a metaphor? This is where design and delivery of curriculum could take into account mature learners unique situations and experience.</p> <p>There needs to be an advisor just for mature students, because our needs are different. We don't have our whole life to go do "this," and then "that" for a while. We pretty much know what we want. Adapt a program to support them. Then too, pros who seem to think they know everything are pre-empted from dismissiveness. They would know where mature students are coming from and adapt.</p>
CINDY	<p>My sheltered, religious background and the female roles modeled did not prepare me for the world outside the home, or one of independence.</p> <p>Being from another generation than my fellow students was a privilege, yet in other ways I was disadvantaged. The younger generation had already developed training, and my years of life experience often seemed useless in my new endeavor and identity.</p> <p>I struggled with the belief that being older, I should do well, if not better, than younger students. I battled back and forth between feeling that I had so much I wanted to say, seeing far beyond what my young peers understood about life, while other times feeling I had nothing to offer. I wondered if others felt that way about me too. I fluctuated between two conflicting expectations: I am older, I should know; but I'm older, so I don't know.</p> <p>I continued to wrestle with my conflicting roles at home and at school. I also encountered a private struggle. I experienced resentment and misunderstanding at times. I had day-to-day responsibilities that younger students did not have to be concerned with...</p>
Theme	CHALLENGES: Difficulties and/or oppositions in the mature learner's university experience
Subtheme #3	Theory and Praxis: Curriculum and delivery, IEPS, Art (Conceptual / Technical)
ROB	<p>It's an unfortunate pattern, because it's a pattern based on regurgitation. If you're strong in memory, you have probably, a 75% going in. The other is tweaking it and giving it back.</p> <p>The art classes were totally different from my other education classes. All the insecurities of being a child were brought to the surface. I have always considered myself to be creative, but have always made a very clear exception to that rule: art.</p>



The classes continued to be a journey deeper into the unknown, which, in many ways, is the known. It was new, while in other ways I found myself falling into assumed perspectives.

Art in many ways is a reflection of who we are and how we choose to express ourselves. I really don't want to have to live out my life inside the lines...[w]orking with clay, I realized that clay and our lives have a lot in common. The finished product is simply a reflection of what was seen all along in your mind, the imagined outcome. There is no right or wrong.

Through art, I realized I can enjoy the process regardless of the outcome. I can draw outside the lines and rediscover. For so long, I had focused only on what it ended up looking like. I had missed the point. Art, like life, is a journey. Enjoy the ride. There is so much more to learn and discover. I am thankful for having my mind and eyes opened to this.

Once I asked my Psychology teacher a question. She's very smart. She looked at me like, "How can you be so stupid?" That's what it felt like. I was to write a paper and include a certain concept, but I didn't understand the term. She looked at me like, "How can you not know?" And I had no idea. I said, "Trust me, I need your help right now, but I will be able to succeed on my own and move further away." That is actually 'The Zone of Proximal Development,' or something like that, which means: "I need your help right now. You are the expert. I'm going to stay close to you. You'll teach me. Then I'll move away, and I'll do it by myself." A lot of people learn that way. I just needed to understand. Rather than memorizing specific terms, I remember meaning, application, or the practical use of something. I won't know the *term*, and that may or may not be important. I guess if you are talking amongst scholars, but talking to a parent, or understanding a child, I think that's more important than the terms.

We don't try to understand who's sitting beside you, who has a whole lot of experience, lacks in a lot of things for sure, but in other things, a wealth of experience. Teachers don't have time for it, but it's unfortunate. There are opportunities that are missed.

ROB	<p>I would also change the marking system. Whatever mark you get, that would be your exact mark; not an 89.7% or a 90.1%. You are fighting for and earning every mark you get, and then they just remove 5% from you with no justification? There's no reason. The GPA absolutely makes no sense! It's frustrating too, because I have no idea what I get on my final exams. It's worth something! I know what mark I got for the course, but I don't know if they are honest with me. Do they push your grade up or down depending on having too many high marks? That happens!</p> <p>When I first entered the program, I wrote my philosophy of learning. It's a cliché, but again, I viewed it as a journey. We have to focus on building the pathway in the bigger picture.</p> <p>Yet, it would be probably wise for most teachers to have lived other experiences first. It would give the teacher perspective of the world out there. Knowing the real world, the corporate world, what people expect and demand of you, just puts things in perspective maybe. It just brings life experience, period. You would relate to parents differently and understand what they are going through. It seems almost like teachers need to start school later in life. It would be good, if it could somehow be worked out. It's important.</p> <p>The three goals of education are 'qualification' and 'instruction,' but the third goal, which is actually the first goal in the list, is 'socialization.' So somewhere along the line, we should be socializing. It means connecting. For what purpose? To create a better community, fit better into society, to be a more functioning, better, citizen. But, we are not learning from each other and we could learn so much. There should be a place for that. It's understanding. But, we are not connecting. We would realize that we are all different. We would learn from each other. We could use each other in a positive way, so we all learn.</p>
ROSEMARY	<p>The professor's approach was of a conceptual nature, and not focused on getting the tools and skills training... I focus mainly on the technical, and that's what differentiates me. The technical could be taught, but the creativity, it comes from within. Sometimes you don't have the tools, and so the creativity will never come out. If somebody really wants to paint, and really wants to draw, focus a little on the technique for a change. This is not how I was taught in my first Painting and Drawing classes. And that model is carried over in Art Education.</p> <p>I got criticized in my Art Ed for actually introducing the technical aspects of art. The criticism was, "Well, we can get this off the Internet." Well, fine, do you put this into practice in your classes? Everything I was offering in terms of my practicum, I still use, but at the same time everything that I offered could have been taken from the Internet verbatim.</p>

ROSEMARY	<p>It really could have! But, knowing it and practicing, or doing it, are two different things.</p> <p>One particular professor I had a hard time with. He was a Masters student. I felt that he didn't understand art as well as he should have. There were a couple of students who were having a rough time, and this was also something the young instructor didn't seem to understand.</p> <p>...it's important to give students a dialogue... Most of all, I value a student-centered environment. I would like detailed information about the process and improvement; otherwise I will go off and learn it on my own.</p> <p>I like to be able to put art into a context in different ways – the historical, the materials, the process, what's behind it, the worldview, etcetera. Knowing this information adds to appreciation. To take in the Art History, take on the worldview of what's going on at that time, say around Matisse, and so understand where he drew his ideas from, adults relate to that.</p> <p>...art teachers have to be able to instill that in their students. Teachers can't forget that students are leaders at the same time. It's a different dynamic, because of course, when you're a teacher and you have a bunch of people doing watercolor, you are the leader. But students are also leaders working on their own little projects. Art Education students will have to turn around and be the boss in the classroom next. Teachers have to be aware that the "boss dynamic" has to be fueled, encouraged, and challenged in their classrooms. Often times, I didn't think that this was covered in the Art Education classes. It's a huge responsibility to grow and to take on a community center, all the programming, all the classroom set-up and planning, all the materials, getting that done. Then also, the course outline, some bureaucracy, sometimes fund-raising, depending. I mean it's huge!</p> <p>Learning should be peer to peer, in many ways. If somebody in your classroom, and hopefully there is a few of them, actually has some teaching experience, build on that. Use their experience, invite them to reflect. Was their method of teaching effective? How? If not, here's the opportunity to make some changes.</p> <p>One thing that really annoyed me was that a lot of professors have never been to any of the practicum sites before. They should go and have a look around and see what students are up against. In some places, students have to build a classroom essentially from nothing.</p>
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ROSEMARY	<p>And that is a huge challenge. You have to create a learning environment, and a lot of people aren't prepared for that. I think they should have more discussion about that in the early classes. You know, maybe have a former student come in and talk about their experience. There is need of this support and instruction.</p> <p>Professors should take the temperature of the classroom every once in a while. Situations where a certain problem is happening a lot may point to the professor's approach. If this is the case, they have to change it, because they are wasting their time if the students are just sitting there and not engaging. There's seems to be a lot of time spent on the peripherals, the theory or other aspects of teaching that are important, but the enactment, the performance, the relational, and the doing needs to be taught. Wouldn't it be revealing if professors had a video recording of themselves talking about readings, and the class is sitting there on i-phones, talking with their girlfriend, and not paying attention? I mean, what a revelation!</p> <p>It is a really sad thing to have a teacher teaching these kinds of sessions. Then the pre-service teachers go out and try it out on a bunch of people and get the same reception. The students reenact what they have experienced and get the same result. What, then, did they get out of being taught to be a teacher? It's not good.</p> <p>So, how do you present it back in the classroom? I don't think that was done very successfully. The responsibility should have been put back on the students perhaps, to prepare something in a presentation back to the class. So this gives a teaching opportunity; students will explore their teaching skills. They could do research, perhaps make a defense, but certainly present it back. It's a skill. It has to be practiced and practiced and practiced...Students could then be asked to give feedback on the presenter. You could pick a different topic each week. For example, the quality of the person's speaking voice, and give feedback on their vocal variation, pronunciation, if they were heard at the back of the room, and so on. So it then becomes a learning experience for both sets of people. It would be personal education as well, rather than a dry thing.</p> <p>The readings are a dry, dry thing. To add something would help. Oh, and half the time, we didn't even talk about an article. Why bother assigning it?</p> <p>Also, there was very little on the therapy aspect of teaching, which would be useful and worth knowing, in helping a blocked artist. To implement some therapeutic stuff would have been helpful.</p>
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ROSEMARY	<p>There is a need to discuss working with these populations. Perhaps get some pointers and get some tools going? A mental health worker came in and did a one-time lecture, but I found it didn't sink into me. I believe it could have been done in a better way with some research and examples that we could reflect on. It's just one thing I felt lacking in. The Minor program must include this kind of teaching.</p> <p>The most common problem I find now, working with adults, is that they're blocked artists. The Art Education Minor did not require specific classes on adult learning. And well, in the future, teaching seniors is going to be a big, if not already huge potential for teaching spots out there.</p> <p>It could be intimidating for the instructor, and the student even, because you are moving away from this safe place with a single leader in the classroom now. You've got two leaders, or three leaders. So it potentially could be a power struggle certainly, depending. In most cases, mature learners are respectful of that, so therefore they don't exert themselves...mature students contribute to a university classroom. They are equipped with a worldview and have experience and information, so they put things into context quickly, based on just things taken in over the years.</p> <p>...We never see with ourselves teaching. So it may be helpful make video recordings of yourself teaching. I think this would be very powerful stuff. I'm talking about presentation skills, gesturing, and relaying an idea. There is a performance aspect to teaching, and that's something that nobody deals with really here in university. But it's important, especially your first class. It's an engagement point - some of your students will stay or won't.</p> <p>In the Art Education setting, where a series of presentations are done, every student could be filmed for a few minutes, and then critique themselves. They would see the technical and theory personified.</p> <p>In preparing to pursue a career as an art teacher, you have to instill a love for learning and show that at every opportunity in the classroom. To always end with, "This is only a starting point of what else is out there." To leave the love for learning open ended, so that this could go on and on, is, I think, what has to happen.</p>
CHARLOTTE	<p>A teacher must not be afraid to take risks, and be a divergent thinker. If you aren't, my honest belief is you are in the wrong profession. Norms have to be set aside now and then, because everybody is different and learns differently.</p> <p>I am so sick and tired of stupid systems, and the idiot bureaucrats in university who sit back behind a big desk and make decisions that they have no right to make, because they are not out in the current classrooms. They need to see what works and doesn't.</p>

CHARLOTTE	<p>I mean, a disability or not, there is a reason students can't do something: is it because there are no actual real life experiences?</p> <p>A student becomes a teacher for the moment, which is the best experience you can give a student, with or without special needs. This is different from "You learn it like this. This is how it's got to be!" That is the worst thing you can do to a student.</p> <p>You have to have it in your heart; your whole body. When I'm teaching, I'm doing, talking, making. I laugh, I cry, I joke with the kids. And then, the kids actually remember.</p> <p>There is no holistic view, no collaboration and people are totally disconnected.</p> <p>Unfortunately, some profs are completely disconnected from what really makes a student learn. At university I had these young teachers who need to listen. If they don't, it doesn't make them a good prof. They have this conceived idea, but it's their idea, not my idea. Teachers should listen to their students. Cause what is your end game? To have students succeed? Or, is it, "Here's my little formula: I see all the answers; this is right, this is right, and I'm done." Honey, you get paid to teach!</p> <p>Teachers need continuing education on who they are teaching. No matter their graduate degree, teachers obviously don't have enough training if they are avoiding this issue, and, if they are ignoring me when I bring this issue forward.</p> <p>Instead, it was all about a lesson plan. What for? You come into a classroom, and you can take that lesson plan and shove it up your god knows what! Paper doesn't talk back, but students do. They might have other interests. If you don't get them interested in what you want, or only because you want them to, that's your first mistake. You need to have a student-based interest. That's how you capture them. From there they fly. Then make sure that there is a progression of learning. That is what you encourage and support in any way you can. When they get into a snag, its, "We are in this together." It has to be a relationship.</p> <p>Many young profs didn't have this sensitivity, or experience. It's not: you are in a power position and now I must listen. This is not how to teach. This is not a good prof, but the worst, if you let people teach like that. They need sensitivity training, like about geriatrics! Well, not geriatrics, ha, but get out and live! Then come back.</p> <p>There was a blatant favoritism for those who adhere to the taught teaching and philosophy in the university classroom. And if it's just wanting the grade, then there is something wrong; that's not constructive learning. Even younger students who had a little slightly different outlook would be wrong... Teachers must adapt and not just say, "This is the way you learn and how it is going to go!" No! There are other ways of learning. It's the divergent thinking model. It's in</p>
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<p>CHARLOTTE</p>	<p>academic papers and publications, but nobody does it. They just talk about it!</p> <p>...if I can explain exactly what I think and get my point across, why the **** do I need more words?" I'm not a child, and, "I told you to do 10 words! You only gave me 7!" That's not what it's about.</p> <p>The age category that I am in is like a special need, in a sense. I have experience. I lived. I've been around the block a few times, and have 25 more years more experience than most of the average teachers and students. So, they might want to consider this.</p> <p>I was not even acknowledged when I raised my hand. I was literally ignored by the prof. I felt like she felt I had nothing to contribute, or, I was a threat. And, I found with young female profs there is almost this competition. There shouldn't be this kind of thing!</p> <p>To some professors I want to say: "Get your head out of your ass and teach! Look around you! You are not teaching a machine; you are teaching human beings that live, laugh, cry, and breathe! Take that into consideration They aren't little robots." Again, this is thinking from the industrial revolution, the Ford model of teaching.</p> <p>The 21<sup>st</sup> century has arrived. But the education hasn't.</p> <p>I look at the lesson plans; they are necessary in training to pace yourself, a guideline. But, let's not forget they are an idea!</p> <p>Why do so many teachers give up after one year? Because they are completely stressed, because universities did not prepare them for reality! That's what I learned: nothing is in place to prepare them for reality (<i>Special Needs; Inclusive classroom</i>). I had the experience and knew my school's policies. Yet, I was to teach (<i>during my practicum with Special Needs students</i>) as to regular kids. I was watched for a half hour, told I was wrong in my approach, and failed my practicum.</p> <p>I'm now more diligent about having IEP's for mature students. And, mature learners need to be respected and incorporated into the classroom. I think I'm a much better student now that I'm older, because I know a lot more.</p>
	<p>...the teacher was completely inflexible. Do we really need more inflexible teachers? Art is about flexibility, about divergent thinking... The expected academics was taught, but that wasn't my problem. There was no room for other ideas! Exceptions were not considered, and no imagination. Only follow the rules.</p>

CHARLOTTE	<p>...my concern was always the evaluating teaching assistant. I only have a few evaluations. During one evaluation, I didn't have time for reflection because it was more important to complete the art making, that the kids have fun. But then I got points taken away? Why do I have to do a <i>stage</i> when I have my own classroom? Honest to god, university programming needs to be flexible with life. They could come and see my program. See me teach. I developed a program. Would you look at it? Would you read it, then come and observe? Everything they want is there.</p> <p>I teach, have children, have a special needs child, and work 3 jobs. I work and have to make a living. I took a huge financial loss; I don't have parents or loans. So, I don't have all the time in the world! This is where design and delivery of curriculum could take into account mature learners unique situations and experience...I've lived this long and I don't have 10 hours a week to spend on an elaborate metaphor crafty thing. I have put effort in a working program that actually exists. And my little artwork is not good enough for a metaphor? Teachers must think about the student in front of them who you are teaching. Learn your learner. Observe!</p> <p>Like back to essential learning and what we need to know as humans, which make us human; to relate to our own feelings, to what is around us. You can do that through art. If you connect it to something real, then it loses the abstract. In education you have to somehow present in a real life experience. You look at the stages of the learning process, or, the human being. First you have to learn certain things, but we learn at different paces.</p> <p>You have to dialogue.</p> <p>The <i>stage</i> program, the way it is now, is not working! It should be every day training in the classroom. Once or twice a week is not giving the whole picture, and I felt disassociated from my school. I was torn between what I had always done and what the university program expected. The program needs to consider we are working with human beings who are always moving, loving, talking, arguing, and learning from mistakes. As a teacher, I need to be continuously connecting with our students.</p> <p>There needs to be a more holistic perspective at the university level, where the whole is seen. Faculty must stay in touch with the teaching world out there. An apprenticeship for student-teachers, at the beginning would help...Yes, have the academic program, you need it; but at the same time, have more vocational training.</p> <p>For mature students like me, I would look at their experience... have individual interviews with mature students, and say, "I know you have valuable life experience. You're over 40, what is your experience? Why are you doing this now? Tell me more about it." I would make notes, then make an Individual Education Plan, an IEP. I'd consider where they are coming from, their experiences, and involve them in the classroom. For the mature student, there is a reason, a background,</p>
CHARLOTTE	



	<p>and a purpose in returning. Again, an IEP because they have life experience, you know?</p> <p>There needs to be an advisor just for mature students, because our needs are different. We don't have our whole life to go do "this," and then "that" for a while. We pretty much know what we want. Adapt a program to support them... They would know where mature students are coming from and adapt. This kind of foundation would help teachers become better teachers, too.</p> <p>Profs have to think outside the traditional program box.</p> <p>I grew up actively learning; this addressed so many problems at the same time, because it's open.</p> <p>There needs to be at least one course that specifically accommodates Art Education for Special Needs. adaptations are very important for even in regular classes. Down Syndrome kids and kids with autism are in the regular school system. You will have to learn how to adapt.</p>
CINDY	Didn't speak directly to this topic