

Make Your Life Your Business:
An Entrepreneurial Approach to Empowering Challenged Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Make Your Life Your Business

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This thesis studies the use of an experiential entrepreneurship program to help young adults who present with learning disabilities to acquire the skills, attitudes, and self-efficacy to achieve their unique potential and to function autonomously and productively as members of their community. The overarching theme and objectives of the pilot program are making the acquisition of life skills more interesting, engaging, and interactive, and ultimately, more effective in empowering these young adults as they navigate through their lives and able dominated society.

DEDICATION

The past 4 years of work and studies culminating in this thesis are dedicated to our youngest son Domenic and all the other challenged members of our communities who rise each and every day and strive to be the best that they can be, who work to achieve independence, to make their dreams a reality and to fit into an able dominated society.

This paper is also dedicated to all the educators, friends, neighbours, and fellow human beings who, in their own special way, make a difference in the lives of others.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background and Rationale.....	3
Some History	6
What Programs Are Being Offered?.....	7
Reality Check.....	10
Lack of Awareness.....	13
CHAPTER II.....	15
Review of Literature	15
Functional Numeracy and Literacy.....	15
Literacy in the Field of Education	16
Communities of Practice and Situated Learning	21
Different Teaching and Learning Philosophies	23
How We Teach: Drawing From the Field of Adult Education.....	24
How We Learn.....	29
More about Experiential Learning	32
Critiques.....	36
CHAPTER III	39

Make Your Life Your Business: A Case Study of Experiential Learning in Practice.....	39
Process	39
Program Overview	42
Program Design	44
Data collection	51
Limitations	54
CHAPTER IV	55
The Program Delivery.....	55
Screening the Candidates.....	55
Modules: Workshop Notes	60
CHAPTER V	92
Findings and Analysis.....	92
Post-Program Interviews with Learners.....	92
Post-Program Interviews with Select Staff.....	106
General Analysis	110
CHAPTER VI	115
Conclusions and Recommendations	115
Conclusion	115
Recommendations.....	117

References.....	120
Appendix A: List of Organizations Considered for the MYLYB Program.....	130
Appendix B: Recruitment Handout	132
Appendix C: Referral Questionnaire	133
Appendix D: Participant Screening Interview Guide	134
Appendix E: Consent to Participate in Research	136
Appendix F: Concerns and Expectations Questionnaire	141
Appendix G: Post Program Interview Questionnaire	142
Appendix H: Post Program Interview Questionnaire	143
Appendix I: Sample Modules	144
Appendix J: Certificates for Participants	154
Appendix K: Letter to Parents	155
Appendix L: Flyer.....	158
Appendix M: Letter of Recommendation.....	159

CHAPTER I

Introduction

For the members of our community who live with disabilities, the additional challenges of less accessibility to services, training, and resources make it even more difficult to pursue certain academic and career goals, and quite simply to achieve their full potential as functioning and contributing members of society. As a result, many find themselves with low self-esteem and lacking the life skills to achieve their aspirations.

The original motivation behind this thesis and the design of the actual pilot program focuses on young adults considered *at risk*: those who are considered to be living with a disability; or who are dealing with any number of physical, emotional, psychological, and academic challenges. Those who need to acquire the specific tools and appropriate life skills to facilitate their navigation through the demands and pitfalls of everyday life. This group of challenged individuals is not getting any younger. According to Statistics Canada (2010), job-related training generally decreases from 40% of 35 to 44 year olds to 28% for those aged 55 to 64, which translates into an aging group of untrained, ill equipped, and often-unemployable citizens. Quebec has the lowest rate in Canada with only 27% of unskilled, middle-aged citizens participating in formal job-related training, and these numbers become even more dramatic when focusing solely on those with disabilities.

The group of learners who participated in the action research part of this thesis were consenting young adults presenting with a variety of learning disabilities. The Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) released December 3, 2007, reported that learning disabilities were the most common form of disability among children between the ages of 5 to 14

years. Many of these young people do not learn the skills or self-efficacy they require to succeed.

MacKeracher, (2004) described adult learning as a "naturally occurring process," a normal function of living, "like breathing," (p. 6) and refers to Cosmides and Tooby (1997, p.11) who claim that learning is "just as easy, effortless and natural to us as humans, as spinning a web is to a spider or dead-reckoning is to a desert ant." For adults with learning difficulties, the process of learning is not quite so natural or as easy as "breathing." Given the context of many adult-learning environments, learning is quite unnatural for many adults with learning disabilities; the social context or learning programs and environments do not foster their ability to learn. This thesis and research focuses on this segment of adult learners.

Today, we have unprecedented access to information, ideas, knowledge, and opportunities for learning that are all enhanced and supported by new technologies. Waks (2013) proclaimed that, "Web 2.0 is the most dominant force of our time, affording ordinary computer users some remarkable creative collaborative powers for learning and net casting action" (p.78). But, are the current training programs sufficiently leveraging these new technologies for young adults with intellectual, physical, or emotional challenges, and in this case learning disabilities? Are they successfully promoting access to acquisition of the appropriate tools and attitudes for these learners to evolve towards becoming contributing, responsible, resourceful, autonomous, and self-sufficient members of their community? What happens to those young people living with disabilities when they turn 18 years old? Is the content of post-secondary programs and other organizations current and effective in preparing these young adults for their unique futures?

Canada's socially funded organizations and institutions are dealing with budget constraints and an overwhelming demand by an increasingly varied group of young adult learners with a plethora of needs and a variety of challenges. What can our existing institutions do to improve these young adults' chances for success and where might the solutions be found? Is it in the more effective delivery of existing programs, more relevant content and a consensus on what success looks like for this population of young and older adults?

Physical disabilities are more evident and have received more attention over recent decades with legislation being established to ensure reasonable access to accommodations and services (Hahn, 1985). There are other less obvious disabilities that require support and investment (Rapley, 1998) and in many cases, learning disabilities go unnoticed and undiagnosed (Donoghue, 2010).

Does the problem lie within society at large, with the learner, or both? These are just some of the questions that need to be answered when evaluating the impact of programs currently in place, to better understand the real needs of this target group, and ultimately to create a more effective program format that provides relevant, practical, and transferrable skills to maximize their opportunity for achievement.

Background and Rationale

Throughout my life, I have been privileged with a plethora of different learning experiences, both formal, and some less traditional and more experiential in nature. Commencing with an affection for volunteer work at a very young age, I have since been actively involved with numerous organizations in different capacities: Big Brothers, The Mackay Center, Batshaw, Kids Help Phone, ProMontreal Entrepreneurs, to name just a few. Whether it is sailing, teaching, and winter camping with youth at risk, or mentoring, managing, and

motivating young people in business, the value of *learning as doing* has been an integral and effective part of the majority of my work and play. In addition, I am confident that the combination of my passion for and slightly different take on the definition of entrepreneurship, together with my academic, business, and volunteer histories can be leveraged to contribute to the development of a credible and effective training program.

Further motivation for this study stems from my youngest son, Domenic (19 years old), who presents with Russell-Silver syndrome, and as a result has been, and always will be, very limited with respect to his ability to learn and acquire certain basic academic skills such as reading, math, writing, and general comprehension, as well as having difficulty with modulation of his emotions and the anxiety that results. Despite being a 19-year-old who has evolved socially and has had the good fortune to be born to a family that has some training and other resources to support him, there remains a serious lack of formal programs and *encadrement* available for our son.

As is the case for so many challenged young adults who are streamed out of overcrowded high schools, the situation worsens after secondary school. Even for those who have been coded in the system, at 21 years of age there is no obligation by the state to provide services or support for our son or any other young adult who lacks the training, skills, and confidence to function comfortably and autonomously in his or her community. For those who have not been coded, the legal obligation ends at 18 years of age.

Providing these citizens with new tools to help them succeed should be an attractive alternative and/or complement to unemployment and other forms of social assistance. According to Statistics Canada (2010), in 2008, approximately 36% of all workers 25 to 64 years of age participated in some type of formal job-related training, which is an increase of 7% from the of

29% in 1997. But, are there enough programs for people living with disabilities and is what is being offered really effective or appropriate for this population of challenged individuals?

"People with disabilities are the world's largest minority group, the only one that any person can join at any time" (Statistics Canada, 2003). A 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS) household survey showed that over 4% of 5 to 14 year olds and 6% of all children aged 5 to 14 have either a physical, cognitive, or emotional disability. At a minimum, there are over 300 thousand young Canadians that are in need of special assistance and support. Obviously, the disability rate in Canada increases steadily with age. For example, the group aged 15 to 24 reported a disability rate of 4.7%, increasing to 15.1% for those aged 45 to 54 (Statistics Canada, 2003). According to the U.S. Social Security Administration, and an organization known as Disabled World, currently, 10% of the total world's population, or roughly 650 million people, live with a disability.

Statistics Canada reported that approximately 20% of Canadians aged 20 years and over have never completed high school, with a disproportionate number of these being youth living with disabilities. There are undeniable costs associated with these facts and as a society we have to question whether or not funds are being effectively invested to address this reality. Hard questions are being asked about the educational services students with disabilities are receiving: how many attend regular classes; how many attend special education classes; what percentage of students are actually receiving the educational services that they need, and what are the perceived barriers to obtaining these services; and what are the most common aids and devices used? The goal of this study is to design, describe, deliver, observe and evaluate an entrepreneurial learning experience and environment for young adults labeled with learning disabilities.

Some History

This increasingly marginalized group of young learners with disabilities has the human right to be valued. Historically, the schools' approach to students with disabilities, academic, or emotional challenges was much the same as it was for certain socioeconomic and ethnic factions of the school population; less was expected, less attention was provided, and these students were tracked, labeled, and streamed towards trades or special classes, resource groups and quite frankly, anywhere that could accommodate them. Canada is not alone in its lack of adequate attention to this particular population.

For example, in Britain segregated education for the disabled goes as far back as the late 1700s where the first school for the deaf was opened in Edinburgh. (The Warnock Report. 1978). Children with developmental challenges were most affected because their conditions were deemed untreatable and so permanent institutions were designed for long-term or lifelong residence (Borsay, 2005, p. 7-17). In India, the disabled are a neglected segment of the population, with poverty alleviation, caste and gender issues, and rural development taking a higher priority (Hegart & Alur, 2002, p.20). Of Pakistan's known population of 1.25 million deaf children, only 2% have any access to schooling (FESF, 2014). The father of a personal acquaintance has just opened his seventh school for the deaf in Pakistan and continues to work hard to remedy this injustice.

Iris Young, an American theorist argued, "social oppression may involve violence, powerlessness, marginalization, exploitation and cultural imperialism. Historically, disabled education was guilty of all five counts" (Borsay, 2005 p.17). Ware (2001) referred to Gilman (1985) who said that the stereotyped/generalized view of the disabled has been one of passivity and dependence. This is the result of limited understanding due to the fact that historically the

focus has been on the individual and their disability and less on the political, economic, and societal context. Ware also cited Morris (1991) who believed that the self-image of the disabled is dominated by the non-disabled world's reaction to them. Ware (2001) viewed the field of education at all levels as having ignored the complexity of being disabled in our North America. In 1987, the Individuals with Disorders Education Act (IDEA) set the tone for inclusion, and similar to how the civil rights legislation was supposed to solve racism, the IDEA and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (American Journal of Occupational Therapy (1992) were supposed to make things right for the disabled. Ware goes on to explain that despite 30 years of policy, society is still perceived to be less than adaptive or even tolerant of the large percentage of the population that live with a disability.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms now guarantees the rights and equality of individuals who live with disabilities. The advent of these rights has had an impact on the manner in which we educate our children who present with challenges. Beginning in the 80s, reforms changed the way these students were integrated into the school system. Each Canadian province has its own laws that define and ensure "appropriate education" for all students, but there is still a lack of detail and consensus around the idea of integration.

There is also a lack of reliable data around children with disabilities and the educational services they are receiving (Statistics Canada, 2001). However, on a positive note, there is more research going on and according to the schools and organizations I met with, there are more programs today than ever before.

What Programs Are Being Offered?

In Quebec, the state is obliged to provide educational services to children with challenges until the age of 21. However, this obligation is limited only to those who have been formally

coded, most often by the school psychologists and educators or external medical professionals. The naiveté of many parents and the restrictive nature of the coding process results in a large number of other challenged young people whose post-secondary options are also extremely limited. Are there enough opportunities to fulfill the growing demands, and are the programs that are being offered achieving their objectives?

Currently, the schools do their best to accommodate the challenged population of students with resource groups and a team of aides to support these efforts. With the reality of limited resources (e.g., Budget cuts; resource educators who are paid 25 hours per week for a 35 plus hour work week; fewer shadows available etc.), mainstreaming and integration becomes increasingly difficult and so resource groups are formed, which further marginalizes this group of students. The ratio of teacher to students in these groups make individualized and tailored curriculum very difficult to enact. In my experience, the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) currently used in public schools illustrate the specific needs of the students, but it appears that adequate resources are not available to sufficiently address these individual needs and require much effort on the part of the educators.

Once these young adult students reach 18 years of age, there are several initiatives in place to try and fill this void, with a variety of organizations providing crucial support outside of traditional school board-managed, public school-type programs. (For a list of some of the organizations that I became familiar with during the course of thesis, please see Appendix A). Regardless of the different school boards or other governing bodies that manage these resources, or their respective sources of funding, they have several concerns in common: lack of space or facilities; limited financial resources; and the difficulty of adapting curriculum to serve learners with exceptionally varied aptitudes and attitudes.

There are some organizations that are trying to provide training services five days a week for students as old as 24, but they have limited capacity. Their ratio of learner-to-educator are on average 12 to 1, with 15 to 1 being the rule of thumb. The majority of those I investigated (very top line view) endorse and perpetuate the Social Integration Services (SIS) credo. These include a variety of activities: group work, projects, cooking programs, and recycling initiatives, to name a few, that take a somewhat entrepreneurial angle in their structure and execution.

In general, the Francophone population seem to be more under-resourced per capita than the English sector, with many using adapted transport to commute from the South Shore to access organizations on the island of Montreal. There are historical factors that have influenced this reality but that is another study altogether.

Perhaps most importantly, while speaking with representatives of different organizations, I did not get the impression that there was much communication between them, which may be a result of too many separate infrastructures, or lack of time or interest. There is, in my opinion, ample opportunity for shared learnings and the chance to collaborate and “build a better mouse trap.” Far be it for this study to discount the value of these existing programs or the efforts of those involved in creating and delivering their programs. My intention rather is to explore an approach that could potentially complement or enhance the curriculum and programs being offered and efforts deployed in these existing organizations. The overarching theme of the pilot is making the acquisition of life skills and developing confidence in those skills more interesting, engaging, and interactive, and ultimately, more effective in preparing these young adults for their future. Empowering them to achieve their unique potential remains the main objective.

It appears that there may exist varying degrees of consensus around the *what* when it comes to the necessity of providing access to skills and resources that will enable and equip the

group being studied, but the *how* is illusive. There is a need for improved learning opportunities and effective delivery of transferable, relevant activities, and the creation of communities of practice and support. There is a preponderance of data that exposes how ineffective the more traditional didactic approach to teaching and education can be even when dealing with motivated learners who possess average intellectual abilities. Jarvis (2010) explains that, “practical knowledge is not limited to knowing but also knowing how and knowing that something will most likely occur given certain conditions and having the tacit knowledge that develops through experience” (p.57). In my view, for these young learners, practical skills and knowledge are the keys to achievement; therefore, a hands-on, experiential, *learning is doing* approach is most appropriate.

Reality Check

Part of the solution to the problem begins with dialogue amongst all the stakeholders so that they are speaking the same language. It is critical to get everyone on the same page, to achieve a common understanding of the definitions and real issues. Even the word “disability” can be cause for confusion.

Disability: The impairment of earning capacity; the loss of physical function resulting in diminished efficiency; the inability to work. Or disability is described as a condition that prevents one from performing usual physical or mental functions. This usually means a permanent state, like blindness, but in some cases is temporary. (West's Encyclopedia of American Law, 2008.)

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada developed a new national definition of learning disabilities in 2002 (p.1). It states:

A Learning Disability refers to a number of disorders, which may affect the acquisition,

organization, retention, understanding, or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency.

In recent times, society and the law have dictated that people with disabilities should be accommodated and encouraged to operate according to their maximum potential and that they have the right to participate in societal and governmental activity without impediments. Hence, there is improved access via ramps, elevators, special parking places, and other special arrangements such as adapted transport that have become mandatory in many provinces, states, and regions. But what about the training and more affected areas of education that they need to be able to achieve their potential?

The impact that being disabled has on one's reality is comparable to the impact of one's gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, particularly when it comes to predetermining the manner in which a student is streamed in school, as well as the resources made available for post-secondary training and integration. The lack of an "elaborated code" and the challenges for the disabled to negotiate and navigate effectively through the world of the dominant culture are strikingly similar to the experiences of lower socioeconomic groups and certain ethnic groups.

The widespread use of labels to track and stream young adults who present with emotional, psychosocial, and physical challenges has had an undeniable impact on the significant percentage of the Canadian and U.S. population who fall into this category. More specifically, those who did not complete secondary five or train for a trade may be dealing with physical or intellectual challenges and frequently end up ill-equipped for the work force and statistically unlikely to secure long term employment.

Students with disabilities drop out of school at significantly higher rates than their peers who do not have disabilities. Across the U.S. during the 2001–02 school year, only 51 percent of students with disabilities exited school with a standard diploma. Arrest rates are relatively high for students with disabilities who drop out. Overall, at least one-third of students with disabilities who drop out of high school have spent a night in jail; this rate is three times more when compared with students with disabilities who have completed high school. Of those who do not complete high school, about 61.2 percent are students with emotional/behavioural disabilities, and about 35 percent are students with learning disabilities. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

Turning to Canada:

Young adults with disabilities are more likely to have discontinued their education without obtaining their high school diploma than young adults without disabilities. 20.1% of young adults with disabilities report they have not completed high school and are not attending school, compared to 9.9% of young adults without a disability. Severity is again a significant factor for high school completion: 33% of young adults with severe or very severe disabilities have dropped out of high school without their diplomas. (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2006.)

There is a need for more informed professionals in the field of adult education and it is time to question and challenge decades-old approaches and attitudes relating to learning disabilities. Disability studies (Albercht, Seelman, & Bury, 2001) explain that in the context of a social model, being learning disabled means to be socially disadvantaged as opposed to physically disadvantaged, not because of the individual's inability to fit in with their surrounding environment, but because of society's tendency to exclude them. Other scholars who focus on

disability (Oliver, 1996; Vernon, 1999) explain that the way of defining disability is crucial to identifying "social barriers" within the lives of those people with disabilities, and once identified, to try and eliminate those barriers.

Lack of Awareness

In a study carried out by Employment and Social Development Canada (2006), almost one-third of parents who reported that their child needed special education services said they had experienced difficulty accessing these services. When offered a list of possible reasons for this difficulty and asked to select all that applied, most parents (75%) chose insufficient level of staffing or services. Almost half of those who reported difficulties said that the problem was related to obtaining an assessment. Additionally, 44% reported communication problems with the school and 39% reported that special education services were not available in their school. (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2006).

In both Canada and the United States, there has been emphasis on the integration of children with disabilities into community settings and the provision of access to non-institutionalized, mainstream educational experiences. Research strongly suggests that there are benefits to a mainstream education for certain groups of disabled children, such as those with physical challenges or mild to moderate conditions, but not for children with severe challenges. This raises questions about coding and accuracy of assessment and availability of resources and how that impacts who goes where. Parents of children with disabilities reported numerous challenges to receiving special services for their children. This included difficulties in receiving assessments, communication problems with the schools, and a lack of services in their area. (PALS, Statistics Canada, 2003).

Evidently, there is inadequate communication amongst stakeholders, and improved access to and awareness of services requires as much attention as the services and programs themselves.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

The sections in Chapter II summarize a variety of attitudes, opinions, and theories that informed my approach to the research. This data clarified and confirmed my own experiential approach and philosophy on how learning occurs, and contributed to my thinking with respect to how I would design and deliver the MYLYB (Make Your Life Your Business) program.

Functional Numeracy and Literacy

An important part of achieving the objectives of this research requires consideration of how functional literacy and numeracy skills are defined as well as how and in what context they are acquired. This section briefly explores these matters with particular regard to different methods for preparing and equipping learners with the ability to function in society in a productive, autonomous, and successful manner. The growing interest in functional literacy, how it is defined, what it means to learners, and how it can best be made accessible is cause for revisiting past and current approaches and attitudes.

I examined some less traditional perspectives on learning and literacy as they relate to empowering individuals and strengthening communities. Some authors suggest that policy makers and educators should look to align their approaches to meet the real needs of learners, and that one must consider not only the relevance of the programs and content, but also that the programs are delivered in an effective manner. There is much more to these programs than simply trying to teach a group of learning-disabled young people to be able to read and there are methods that can facilitate access to and acquisition of certain life skills and abilities--that functional literacy is more of a means to an end.

While somewhat ambitious, this quick overview of the literature on literacy did help to pave the way to my thesis research. I explore some interesting methods and ideas for effective learning with the aim to empower individuals and to decrease the number of people who have been labeled as functionally illiterate.

Literacy in the Field of Education

“If a child can’t learn the way we teach, then maybe we should teach the way they learn” (Estrada, 2011).

Where does something as fundamental as literacy fit in the field of education? Why does this question warrant our attention? What are the consequences of being functionally illiterate?

According to the U.S. Department of Education and National Institute for Literacy (April 2011), 21% of the adult population is considered illiterate and this has not improved in ten years. Functional illiteracy and academic failure are undeniably linked to violence and crime, with the U.S. Department of Justice confirming that 85% of all juveniles that become part of the criminal legal system are functionally illiterate. Several nations, including the U.S., have been involved in a push for professionalism of the field of literacy and the pursuit of evidence-based instruction.

The Canadian statistics are no less alarming with 42% of Canadian adults between 16 and 65 years of age having what is considered as low literacy levels (Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, 2012). Quigley (1997) reports that there have been many unsuccessful attempts to achieve parity of child and adult literacy. Some have argued that literacy is a right not a privilege, while others feel that the taxpayers should not have to spend twice for literacy--both for school kids and for those adults who may have dropped out of school.

Quigley (1997) also provides some general descriptions of popular terms such as adult literacy, which refers to the general field of practice and study, and basic literacy that involves more volunteer and part-time programs instructing adults with basic skills of reading and writing. Theoretical perspectives on defining and understanding literacy are changing and this includes revisiting the definition(s) of literacy and how it is no longer limited to focusing predominantly on reading and writing. Along with the idea of multiple and everyday literacies and the view of literacy as social, there is momentum towards bringing the vernacular into the schools and literacy instruction (Purcell-Gates, 2007, p.7).

Theorists such as Gee (2008) refer to literacy as a “socially contested term,” and with the postmodernist trend of rejecting older, far-reaching theories, there is more consideration of the contextual realities of learners (Purcell-Gates, 2007). Street (1984) explains literacy not as a skill that is acquired but rather as an “ideological construct” and he introduced the idea of multiple literacies that are related to the context of application.

If functional illiteracy is viewed as the inability to read and write adequately, hindering a person’s chance to work, function, and navigate their way through life, then should we not be scrutinizing current teaching methods? Should we not consider new approaches to facilitate effective ways of learning, thereby addressing the issue of high levels of functional illiteracy?

Evidence shows that historically, literacy studies have not intended to focus solely on preparing people for work-related tasks or professional development, but have also emphasized the behaviour and attitudes that are considered acceptable or appropriate by the elite. Our schools and the educational system appear to have changed very little. Gee (2008) attributes this to the constant need for certain types of workers for certain jobs that our economic structure depends on (p.59). Gramsci (1971) credits literacy as consistent throughout history as it is used

to, “solidify the social hierarchy and empower elites.” It is not difficult to find examples of how the dominant culture uses literacy to perpetuate its values and facilitate the ability to basically “screen and stream” people to fulfill their means and to retain a “grasp on social and political power, status and privilege” (Purcell-Gates, 2007, p.2).

Alas, “the times they are a-changin” and there appears to be diminishing emphasis on language, i.e., reading and writing, counting and a trend towards finding new and improved ways of teaching and learning. Kress (2000) explains that the advent of a variety of new technologies have facilitated the transformation of information from simply written, to visual, audio and digital formats and modes, to name a few.

The rapidly changing social and cultural climates demand further examination of the variety of modes of communication that exist and how and what we learn. Kress’s (2000) research on drawing and visual expression illustrates how different modes can be interpreted and misinterpreted and how they are loaded with parameters and expectations that stem from their cultural context. The origins of this are not limited to language. He also examines the biological and physiological fundamentals of how humans interact with their environment and questions the focus on language as a “single and homogeneous system of representation” (p.186). Street (1984) explains that with literacy being “rooted in socio-historical contexts,” it has to include more than just specific uses of linguistic symbols and signs.

Inspired by Paulo Freire, the Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Community Techniques program (REFLECT, 1993-1995) using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods, is an example of a less traditional and more effective approach to teaching people to read and write. Equally important is connecting literacy to broader community development and empowering those who participate (Archer & Cottingham, 1996).

Archer and Cottingham (1996) refer to literacy circles where there are no textbooks. Dialogue is emphasized and the participants develop their own learning materials, such as the use of graphics and simple materials to create maps and calendars to organize visually and eventually in writing what they already know and what is already familiar and represents their respective realities. This type of pilot program resulted in self-realization, increased community participation, and actions to improve the participants' working and living conditions. The benefits of this approach have as much to do with empowerment as they do with literacy. Archer and Cottingham's research illustrates how, practical literacy skills have little value on their own. They go on to explain that using the appropriate participatory methodology exposes and encourages the use of literacy and its application in the participants' day-to-day reality and context.

This appears to be because the REFLECT approach involves two parallel and interweaving processes: a literacy process and an empowering process. The literacy gives people practical skills which will help in the empowerment process (e.g., as they assume positions of responsibility in community organizations) and the empowerment process in turn creates uses of literacy in people's everyday lives. (Archer & Cottingham, 1996, p.iii.)

Archer and Cottingham (1996) explain how, "Literacy is defined by each society, not by some universally standard independent mark." As referred to by Street (1993), Kulick and Stroud declare that, "Individuals in a newly literate society, far from being passively transformed by literacy, instead actively and creatively apply literacy skills to suit their own purpose and needs"(p.3). The REFLECT approach stands as an inspiring contrast to the disappointing results of so many "literacy campaigns." For instance, UNESCO's Literacy Initiative for Empowerment

(LIFE) pointed out that despite the campaign resulting in some reduction in the illiteracy rate in Nigeria, there were observations recorded that strongly reinforced the importance of increased relevance and applicability of what is being taught or learned. In many campaigns these are not linked.

Rather than provide adults with functional literacy skills, which would have stimulated positive future perspectives, the programs were reduced to basic literacy, which failed to provide them with knowledge for self-fulfillment and improved living standards. This approach was less attractive to adult learners and thus deterred some from participating in literacy training programs. (Aderinoye, 2008, p. 606.)

It appears that in many cases, there exists a major weakness with these literacy campaigns in that they are not closely linked to adults' working life or their basic needs for economic and social development and empowerment.

Adding to the foregoing theoretical and practical views of literacy, Kress, as referenced by Eyman (2008), "seeks to make a distinction between resource (knowing how to write) and its use," and clearly differentiates literacy as a much broader concept than simply the ability to read and write. There is a need for more recognition of the relationship between what is being taught and what is being practiced. Purcell-Gates (2007) asks, "Does the instruction motivate the students to learn the skills so that they can engage in practice later?" (p.7).

After all, doesn't *functional* mean *to function*? With the growing consensus that there exist different forms of literacy, there is recognition of the complementary nature of the different literacies, and how a learner's "literacy set" and "lens" affects what they retain and apply. "...[S]tudents will take from instruction that which makes sense to them that which allows them to participate in the written genres that make up their literacy lives" (Purcell-Gates, 2007, p. 14).

Communities of Practice and Situated Learning

“Meaningful learning will only take place if it is embedded in the social and physical context within which it will be used” (Brown et al., 1989).

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) somewhat anthropological approach to learning focuses on social context and the interaction within those settings, emphasizing collective learning, and the significance of general group dynamics as they pertain to learning. This appeals to my personal affection for educational programs that are experiential in nature, and my pursuit of alternatives to traditional teaching methods (i.e., the direct teacher to student teaching found most often in a closed classroom).

There is an undeniable need to make sense of things in relation to what one has experienced. As parents and educators, we tend to suggest actions, and to teach and reward attitudes based on our own values. So often, the state-dictated curriculum and objectives appear to offer insufficient consideration for *who* is actually doing the learning and their respective needs and interests. Seillière and Baron (1921) cite Rousseau’s early observations that, “An error difficult to avoid is always to assume the child (or learner of any age) has the same taste for activities about which the Master is enthusiastic” (p. 189). It is my view that not only does learning take place by doing, but that learning is doing and being able to transfer, apply, and leverage the skills being offered.

Conceptually, communities of practice are groups of “knowers” who have affinity for each other due to shared knowledge and understandings. “Knowledge is situated, being in part a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used. Therefore, learning methods that are embedded in authentic situations are not merely useful; they are

essential” (Brown et al., 1989). “Situated learning occurs when students work on authentic tasks that take place in real-world settings” (Winn, 1993, p. 123).

Lave and Wenger (1991) challenge the premise that learning results from being taught, and that it takes place separate from other routine activities; that it is an individual psychological or cognitive process. They migrate from the psychological view of learning and posit that real learning occurs as a result of participation, interaction, and experience in a social situation. In my view, this theory is supported by the fact that practically from birth, we acquire the ability to walk, talk, and eat through interaction and observation, without necessarily being formally taught how to do so.

They also explain how all activities occur somewhere (i.e., are situated) and that there is the potential for learning to take place anywhere but that the influence of any knowledge can vary relative to a particular environment or context and who is participating. In other words, relevance, and even the degree of loyalty or commitment to the actual context, will and does influence how much is really learned. This suggests that a process of engagement and interaction is needed, and that this occurs in what Lave and Wenger term “communities of practice.” According to Lave (1991), general knowledge on its own is meaningless until it is activated or “enabled” in a context that makes it relevant.

I appreciated Lave’s (1991) simple illustration of how most information, when delivered in the context of a story or situation, comes alive and becomes more meaningful. The effective use of analogies and metaphors support the idea that we communicate more clearly and effectively when we frame the information being shared in a way that provides some context.

With the reality of the statistics of functional illiteracy levels and in context of the emphasis on the universal features of literacy and its transformative power (Brandt & Clinton,

2002; Barton & Hamilton, 1998), it's difficult to argue Maddox's (2007) claim that there needs to be more theorizing and research to validate this "literacy thesis," including "the need for situated understandings of technology in practice" (p. 47).

Different Teaching and Learning Philosophies

"Tell me and I will forget. Show me and I may remember. Involve me and I will understand" (Chinese Proverb).

Traditionally, formal learning has taken place in a classroom, lecture hall, schoolhouse, or somewhere other than where most of the acquired knowledge will actually be applied. Some exceptions to this include apprenticeship programs and *workwiths* (i.e., shadows) to help teach and train on the job. This section examines some perspectives on the different teaching and learning methodologies that exist, and how and where they may or may not be effective.

Academic pursuits are not necessarily directly tied to the various other facets of our lives outside of the classroom, away from our computer screens, books, phones, and iPads. While it might seem obvious that true learning cannot be sufficiently defined as just acquiring facts, knowledge, and statistics, it appears that our traditional approach to teaching, learning, and school suggest otherwise. Bouchard refers to Barer-Stein and Kompf (2000) when he explains how such a small percentage of our lifetime learning occurs during formalized training and schooling (p.165-181). The pilot study in this thesis adopts and emphasizes the value of learning through experience. It is, however, understandable that as educators, we need to better understand the different perspectives and what assumptions support the notion of experiential education, how successful it has been, and where and why. It is also appropriate to review what objections might exist that challenge this notion, as well as learning more about traditional methods.

How We Teach: Drawing From the Field of Adult Education

Didactic teaching is the most common approach to teaching and learning and is what we are accustomed to. A party other than the learner chooses the information and knowledge related to a field, and then delivers it to the learner with the expectation that they will be able to memorize and reproduce it, and then have that reproduction evaluated based on accuracy and depth of understanding. It does not necessarily expect or encourage the learners to analyze or evaluate the information. Obviously, since the learner is not selecting the content, the relevance to the learner can vary significantly. The level of expectations for analysis and comprehension tends to rise at university level; nevertheless, this approach can often result in reproduction of the status quo.

This may be effective and necessary, especially when retention of certain facts and formulas is crucial, such as in medicine, engineering, or other sciences, for example. This does not mean however that information should be disseminated in a manner where the students are not coached to challenge the information or facts, question its validity, and receive guidance from or facilitation by teachers to encourage the analysis and synthesis of what has been well presented to them. All this should of course take place within age and aptitude appropriate expectations.

One should not discount or diminish the value of the didactic approach, and it is still considered key to employers for training and improving the performance, competence, and capacity of their employees. However, Jarvis (2010) refers to studies by Marsick (1987) and Casner-Loto (1988) that reinforce the idea that a more eclectic or varied approach is more effective where students are encouraged to ask questions and “initiate the learning process.”

The Socratic approach is more about a logical or strategic use of questioning directed to the students. Leaders and teachers coach, enable, and facilitate access to knowledge already processed by the student but not always realized. This method assumes, however, that those students have already acquired, perhaps incidentally, a certain degree of cultural knowledge.

A good personal example of this would be my diploma experience at the Richard Ivey School of Business. Fifteen years ago I had the privilege of attending a very condensed, intense, and demanding 350+ hours of studies over two three-week periods of 6.5 days per week (i.e., a type of condensed MBA type program). I had never studied business but had been operating in a senior management capacity for one of the biggest food companies in the world, and I was fortunate to be accompanied by fellow attendees from other businesses that had years of senior business management experience. Many had MBAs or other business training, and a couple of them were in similar situations to mine.

The Ivey Business School used a very Socratic/facilitative approach, including the case study method, which allowed me to truly participate, despite any of my weaker areas, and at the same time I was able to add value in the areas where I had more experience. My point here is that I would never have succeeded in that graduate diploma program if it had not been for the abundance of knowledge and familiarity with the business culture that I had acquired incidentally and through necessity over the 15 previous years in business and people management. Socratic teaching would likely be much less successful in a room where learners have little or no hands-on, real-life experience and/or exposure to the subject matter. I was able to make an important contribution to the creation of knowledge during those six weeks at the University of Western Ontario, and this was a result of both the instructor's teaching methods combined with my accumulated and related life experience.

Facilitative teaching seeks to make the student aware of specific learning needs. The facilitators assist by creating an environment using certain exercises, case studies, and set of questions for which answers, solutions, ideas, and often-new questions are expected from the students. The teachers do not dictate the outcome or what the result should be as would be the case with a multiple-choice exam, for example. Some go as far as to suggest that teacher involvement might inhibit the learner's freedom to learn. What is "freedom" in this context? Jarvis (2004) refers to Boud and Bridge (1974) who distinguished four types of freedom: Pace, Choice, Method, and Content (p.6).

Providing all these choices for a student(s) in an institutionalized course would likely prove difficult. However, considering the importance of these freedoms then begs the question of how appropriate can any singular teaching method really be for adult education?

Experiential teaching often removes the learners from the classroom and very often occurs in an environment markedly different from where the practical application of acquired knowledge actually occurs. There is much emphasis on learning with the senses and learning in a practice situation. More work-based experiential education is used for professional preparation.

Role-play and case study methods are increasingly being introduced to simulate real life situations. This approach promotes problem and work-based learning. I refer to Cunningham, Gourley and Kronick (2011) who describe the complementary nature of higher-level thinking, experiential learning, and action theory which dominates the teaching and learning style found in service-learning.

Such teaching and learning, miles away from the usual didactic method that encourages memorization and regurgitation, the inert knowledge problem of teaching *facts* as if they are objective, universal, and unchanging. Service-learning pushes the student into a

challenging environment demanding reflection and action. (Cunningham, Gourley & Kronick, 2011, p.34.)

If we cross-reference the characteristics of experiential learning with the significant developmental changes that occur during adult years, it seems apparent that the principles are ideal for maximizing and facilitating the opportunity for such growth.

Kohlberg (1976) describes what some theorists agree are the key areas of adult development: Cognitive (knowledge acquisition and organization, information processing abilities, growth of intellectual skills and problem solving abilities); Moral, ethical, spiritual (ability to reason about moral and ethical issues, development of respect and tolerance, development of faith beliefs, consideration of meaning and purpose of life); Social-emotional (autonomy, attachment relations, self-regulation, coping, generativity); Physical (general health and well-being, involvement in health sustaining activities such as exercise); Cultural and civic (understanding social norms, role of laws, and customary practices in civic society; aesthetic appreciation; participation in civic duties such as voting); and Vocational (occupational exploration and development, skill building).

It is difficult to argue with Kohlberg's theory about how growth within a domain can influence other domains, and that there is overlap between cognitive and moral development.

Kohlberg's theory compares traditional learning with experiential learning, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. *Conventional Training versus Experiential Learning*

Conventional Training	Experiential Learning
Training-centred/focused: theoretical	Learner/focused: really doing it
Prescribed fixed design and content	Flexible open possibilities
For external needs (organization, exams, etc.)	For internal growth and discovery
Transfers/explains knowledge/skills	Develops knowledge/skills/emotions via experience
Fixed structured delivery/facilitation	Not delivered, minimal facilitation, unstructured
Time bound measurable components (mostly)	Not time bound, more difficult to measure
Suitable for groups and fixed outcomes	Individually directed, flexible outcomes
Examples: powerpoint presentations, chalk-and-talk classes, reading, attending lectures, exam study, observation, planning and hypothesizing, theoretical work, unreal role-play.	Examples: learning a physical activity, games and exercises, drama and role-play which becomes real, actually doing the job or task, 'outward bound' activities, teaching others, hobbies, pastimes, passions.

Several researchers and educators agree that experiential learning experiences have a positive effect on learners' cognitive and intellectual development and promote a sense of civic responsibility and engagement (Billig, 2000; Billig & Klute, 2003; Conrad & Hedin, 1991; Furco, 2002; Morgan & Streb, 2001; Scales, Berkas & Blyth, 2000).

If we consider the Cushman (1999) view of the mission of higher learning as involving three unrelated tasks or duties—research, teaching, and service—then experiential learning has

the ability to integrate and engage these duties. It is the combination of both classroom instruction with community work and real-life situations.

How We Learn

While there are a variety of theories around the different ways we learn, experiential learning is recognized as an important method for working at analysis synthesis and evaluation (Cunningham 2011) and is the approach that is favoured throughout the MYLYB program. Freire (1970) concluded that by integrating theory and practice, people are empowered with the ability to actually impact the course of change instead of just responding or reacting to it. In this way, education can serve as a *vehicle* for the transformation of society. Rosenberg claims that in the traditional classroom, students are not empowered and students are being separated from a real world context by the “unreal” world of education (Rosenberg, 2000).

Experiential learning does not necessarily require a teacher and it relates to the process of attaching meaning that results from the individual's direct experience. Acquiring knowledge is a naturally occurring process that is innate. More often than not, real value or insight from an exchange with someone or from some experience only occurs afterwards. This speaks to the importance of reflection, conceptualizing, and actually testing and applying what was experienced, as the learning does not necessarily occur during the concrete experience itself.

According to Kolb (1983), knowledge is continuously gained through both personal and environmental experiences. He explains that there are certain prerequisites for acquiring genuine knowledge from an experience: The learner must be willing to be actively involved in the experience; the learner must be able to reflect on the experience; the learner must possess and use analytical skills to conceptualize the experience; and the learner must possess decision-making and problem-solving skills in order to use the new ideas gained from the experience.

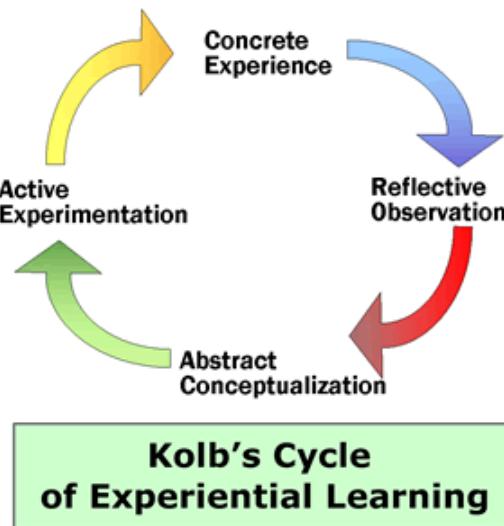


image by Karin Kirk

Figure 1. Kolb's cycle of experimental learning

To help clarify the difference between learning and experiencing, we can look at how individuals affiliate with a particular learning style. Kolb defines three stages of development wherein a person matures and develops the ability to integrate various learning styles.

1. Acquisition: Birth to adolescence; development of basic abilities and “cognitive structures.”
2. Specialization: Schooling, early work and personal experiences of adulthood; the development of a particular “specialized learning style” shaped by “social, educational, and organizational socialization.”
3. Integration: Mid-career through to later life; expression of non-dominant learning style in work and personal life.

While I do not discount the behaviourist and cognitivist learning theories, the design of MYLYB adopts more of a constructivist and social learning theory approach. Having been

personally privileged with a variety of experiential learning opportunities, one of the things that made these types of learning situations so appealing to me is their well-rounded nature, namely the consideration of the physical and spiritual aspects of learning as well. Almost all adults are involved in some sort of physical learning, with many of these activities also including cognitive, social, and spiritual aspects (Mackeracher, 1998). Programs like Outward Bound, other service-learning programs and workplace training are just a few examples that include an important physical element.

Brandt, Farmer and Buckmaster (1993) describe the process of cognitive apprenticeship, which has many similarities to Kolb's experiential education process. They list five phases: modeling, approximating, fading, solo performance and discussing the skill learning. Cognitive apprenticeship opens the door to knowledge that the more traditional forms of instruction doesn't necessarily offer, more specifically, the previously mentioned tacit knowledge needed for performing in the real world.

Mackeracher (1998) expands on how spiritual learning helps us to connect with a higher consciousness or cosmic being, and refers to this as "transcendent learning." Wilbur's (1986) "transformative learning" describes moving beyond the limits of our model of reality, and Mezirow (1991) refers to moving beyond the limits of our self-system to touch others in meaningful ways, which is referred to as "transpersonal" learning (Roberts & Clark, 1975).

Mackeracher (1998) also lists the conditions that facilitate spiritual learning with learners who are open to new experiences and new ideas; are aware of their own state of consciousness; avoid judging their thoughts or experiences; reflect on their thoughts and experiences; revisit the reflection; share their experiences; and look for connections in unlikely places, even between apparently unconnected and disparate ideas and experiences (p.172).

More about Experiential Learning

“Experience without learning is better than learning without experience” (Latin proverb).

Why and how does experiential learning make sense, particularly in relation to adult education? This next section briefly explores further the attributes and potential advantages and the premise behind the nature of the experiential approach to education, its value in the context of more traditional educational methods, and its relevance to adult learning. Speck (2001) recommends that we first look at the objectives that support the various activities under the umbrella of experiential learning, i.e., Community and service-learning, Free choice learning, Cooperative learning, Action and Adventure learning. He refers to the commonalities across several definitions: separation, integration, and engagement.

Learning by doing and undoing, reflecting, questioning, researching, and responding in a variety of practical experiences is key to development. In my view, when coupled with the best of the more formal and traditional approaches, this eclectic combination contributes to the evolution of a well-rounded person in one’s work, family life, and as a member of the community. This thesis case study draws on this approach to learning, pointing to the benefits of participating in experiential learning activities and other seemingly unrelated “school” experiences that provide and provoke insight, personal growth, and new perspectives that can be brought to bear on one’s day-to-day activities.

In my view, programs that adopt and perpetuate an experiential approach to teaching and learning such as Outward Bound, service-learning and cooperative learning, and this Make Your Life Your Business thesis case study, to name just a few, all have much in common with Lave and Wenger’s (1991) school of thought. These different methodologies are somewhat less narrow in that they do consider the psychology of learning, and are less black and white in how

they consider cognition, transferability of knowledge, and the evaluation of the different levels of learning. Rather than asking what kinds of cognitive processes and conceptual structures are involved, Lave and Wenger ask what kind of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place. Rather than perpetuating the marginalizing of groups of individuals because common theories tend to “reduce learning to individual mental capacity/activity,” Lave (1996) suggests, “a reconsideration of learning as a social, collective, rather than an individual, psychological phenomenon” (p.149).

Experiential education can be well described as the process that occurs between a teacher and student that combines direct experience with the learning environment and content. The Association for Experiential Education (2012) regards experiential education as: "A philosophy that informs many methodologies, in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities."

Regardless of similarities and connections between all these approaches to education and how broad the range of definitions might be or some of the arguments or objections that may arise, there does appear to be an increasing consensus around some of the distinctive characteristics of these different approaches.

When discussing service-learning for example, Cunningham et al (2011) refer to Cashel, Goodman and Swanson (2003) who emphasize: learning through active participation; integrating into the academic curriculum provision of structured time for reflection; applying newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations; and extending student learning beyond the classroom.

Over 100 years ago, Dewey (1897) was already attempting to demonstrate how much more learning was influenced by what the student experienced, and not so much a result of the teacher's performance. Sansone, Morf and Panter (2004) refer to Lewin's equation which supports how we learn to behave: $B = f(P, E)$. It simply states that a person's behaviour is a function of the interaction between a person and their environment, and not a function of what they are told to do. In simple terms, *you learn what you live.*

Experiential learning is currently being delivered or employed in a variety of ways in many educational practices underway in schools and in out of school where there are more informal education programs. Many methods of instruction use experiential learning to help with context and structure when learning through action and reflection. Outdoor education organizes a variety of learning activities that occur in the outdoors where the environmental experiences are used as a learning tool. Service learning combines community service with stated learning goals and leverages experience as the foundation for meaning. This method has become increasingly popular and even a compulsory part of many curriculums at the high school level.

Cooperative learning is an approach that looks to address the reality of different learning styles and needs of students. Different from group work and described as "structuring positive interdependence" (Slavin, 1990), students must collaborate toward academic goals that are organized in the classroom as academic and social learning experiences. The intention is to diminish, if not eliminate, the competitive nature of working individually, promote cooperation, and leverage the skills and knowledge of each of the participants.

This method greatly resembles the aforementioned facilitative approach to teaching and is influenced by the studies of the scholars: Brown and Parker (2009), D. W. Johnson and R.T.

Johnson (1994), Siltala (2010), Slavin, (1994, 1995), and S. Sharan and Y. Sharan (1992). These scholars provide a list of five essential elements of cooperative learning:

1. Positive interdependence.
2. Face-to-face promotive interaction.
3. Individual and group accountability.
4. Social skills.
5. Group processing.

In order for student achievement to improve considerably, two characteristics must be present. First, when designing cooperative learning tasks and reward structures, individual responsibility and accountability must be identified. Individuals must know exactly what their responsibilities are and that they are accountable to the group in order to reach their goal. Second, all group members must be involved in order for the group to complete the task. In order for this to occur, each member must have a task that they are responsible for which cannot be completed by any other group member (Brown & Ciuffetelli Parker, 2009; Siltala, 2010).

Dewey and more recently Hahn explain how the methodologies reflected in experiential education continue to evolve, and for experiential education to be considered efficient pedagogy, the physical experiences must be combined with reflection. There is the need for the reflective practice to promote personal introspection of the challenges and key learnings. The physical challenges are a means to an end in that they provide a “gateway” through which we can observe qualities and traits about ourselves and the others participating in the team or exercise or activity. In order for experiential education to be effective, the experiences must be separated, and the learner needs enough time to actually process the information (i.e., the “solo” in Outward Bound

and emphasis on time alone, the formal provision of questions and reflection after an activity, etc.)

Critiques

The Astin and Sax study (1998) reported that those who participated in service-learning, community service, and experiential learning activities outside of the traditional classroom during undergrad years experienced enhanced academic and life skills development and sense of civic responsibility. My own impressions of the research I have done tend to reinforce that experiential activities do contribute to the development of a more well-rounded, civic minded citizen. Regardless of my obvious affection for experiential learning, it is always wise to pay attention to informed opinions that offer different views and perspectives: “Community service as a panacea to bridge class differences, as well as racial differences falls apart upon close examination of our data” (Neururer & Rhodes, 1998, p. 325).

Miller (1997) reported that in his study of college freshmen, “students perceived people to have less power than before the experience of service-learning” (p.18). Speck (2001) points out three major challenges or objections to experiential learning outside of the classroom environment:

1. It takes too much time and too many resources; the time and energy and resources that it requires can be perceived as detracting from study and course content.
2. It should not be required; objections to experiential education programs being compulsory.
3. It should be resisted because it’s a form of indoctrination. Making it a requirement to work outside of the classroom and in the community or outdoors, for example, can be interpreted as intended to impose/breed a long lasting desire for voluntary service. This

objection may be result of the view that volunteerism is spontaneous, when really it is learned.

There is some skepticism around experiential learning being somewhat goal free versus stated objectives, making measuring achievement more challenging, and perhaps less credible in the eyes of some. Are experiential learning activities considered a less structured domain, and if so, does that make the learning less “authentic”?

Despite these questions, and the arguments and objections worthy of consideration, the results of my research, combined with my own personal experience and observations (perhaps there is some bias), weighed much more heavily in favour of the benefits of an experiential and environmental approach to learning and teaching than against it. More research is needed to determine if and why this approach influences moral development. There are however, countless theories and studies that do exist on how exposure to new experiences, new social relationships, and the need for self-reliance are factors that can and do generate good cognitive moral conflict from these new perspectives, which then influence a student’s moral development (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Experiential learning has to be better recognized as a credible tool, method, and approach to learning and not just a “nice to have”! Experiential learning opportunities are not necessarily intended to be permanent alternatives to the classroom. As a result of work and career activities, pastimes, and hobbies, so many adult learners already find themselves in some great experiential learning situations and environments every day. This does not diminish the value of occasionally being completely removed from one’s day-to-day familiar environment. A new scene, completely different activities, a marked departure from normal routine can and does provide for distance, reflection, and perspective.

The bottom line is that teaching to the test scares me. An eclectic approach to facilitate the learning process, with a desired emphasis on the experiential, is what significantly influenced the design and delivery of this program, which is outlined in Chapters III and IV, respectively.

CHAPTER III

Make Your Life Your Business: A Case Study of Experiential Learning in Practice

Process

To review: the intent of the thesis pilot study was to develop and execute an experiential learning program and to observe, record, and analyze predominantly qualitative data. The main objective was to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of implementing a variety of exercises, activities, and learning techniques that are aligned with the overarching theme of entrepreneurship. This study is heuristic and inductive in nature and examines the reaction and behaviour of participants. It also considers observations from other professionals that work with these participants on a regular basis.

I was mindful of the Action research model that emphasizes the relevance of content and delivery to the participants, with the process illustrated in the diagram below. (See Figure 2) There is important emphasis on the reflective nature of the process, and the data analysis looks not only at what data is generated, but asks why.



Figure 2

For the purpose of recruiting consenting young adults as volunteers for this pilot, I met with several organizations whose programs cater to young adult learners. (See Appendix A for partial list.) Some were referred and some were organizations that I (the researcher) had previously worked or been involved with over the last 20 years. There were some very positive responses and immediate interest from EMSB, the YMCA, and the Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeois. Finally, the organization selected was a centre d'éducation aux adultes offering service de formation à l'intégration social in Lachine. Let's call it "Select."

The decision to work with Select was influenced by: convenience and flexibility of locale; opportunity to work with adults with a variety of learning disabilities; access to other professionals with expertise and hands-on perspective; the organization's keen interest; and finally, the overall credibility of the organization. My only hesitation was the fact that my son, Domenic, attended this centre, and I did not want to interfere with, invade in any way or disturb his "world." I finally decided that since it was for such a short period and near the end of the school year, that my limited time in his school would not be an issue. Fortunately it was not. In fact, it was interesting and impressive how well Domenic dealt with and compartmentalized my role at the school.

On a very personal and somewhat unrelated side note, my work with these comparatively older more mature young adults that I selected, encouraged me that eventually my son might also achieve the abilities and attitude required for him to participate in a program similar to MYLYB.

Once the organization and locale were secured and the ethics department approved the Summary Protocol Form (SPF) and the program, I sent it to the head of Select, as well as the Directrice at the centre. I then distributed a handout in the school to advertise and solicit interest from adult learners. (See Appendix B.) I also did a Q&A/ meet and greet onsite with two classes the following week. Through emails and referrals from the staff, I found myself with ten potential candidates.

Upon receipt of the referral questionnaires (Appendix C), the students were met for introductory interviews in a neutral, familiar (to the candidates) and comfortable location in the school. I provided the candidates with an overview of the program's objectives and approach and asked several open-ended questions geared to understanding their personal interests, aptitudes and attitudes (Appendix D). With the permission of the candidates, some information about literacy levels and other participant specifics (but limited specifics on formal diagnosis) was also provided to me from the staff at Select.

Once the group had been formed, consent forms (Appendix E) were signed, meeting times and dates were formalized and agreed to, and the group organized to meet weekly for 8 to 10 weeks. For the offsite activities, additional waiver forms for responsibility and participation were signed for liability purposes.

My decision to have limited access to diagnosis specifics was intentional and stems from my own past experience as well as coaching from colleagues in the field. I have learned that a medical diagnosis should not be the primary lens through which the first impressions of an individual are based; that no code should dictate how one views a person or evaluates their abilities. I think that this can sometimes serve to cap their potential.

Program Overview

Who: The participants were a small group of six young adults between 21 to 25 years of age, recruited and selected through the aforementioned referrals and interviews process.

What: The participants were given the opportunity to interact with a team of contemporaries while learning about and building a mock business.

Ethics: In addition to the information contained in the summary protocol form (Appendix E) the reader will recall that the participants were provided an opt-out option at any time, if so desired and real names were not used in the thesis nor in data summary.

Where: Centre d'éducation aux adultes Select de LaSalle.

When: April to June 2016. 90-minute sessions on Wednesdays from 10:30–12:00.

Why: The recent and growing popularity of TV shows like *Dragons' Den* and *Shark Tank* are just a small indication of an apparent growing interest in business and entrepreneurship for many people, in or out of school. This appeal could provide a more effective and attractive platform for transmitting fundamental skills in a way that is more palatable and appealing; creating *communities of practice* (Wenger, 2011), where learners collaborate, create, and acquire new skills while they also have a chance to feel better about themselves, improve their self-esteem and confidence, and increase their motivation to help themselves as well as others.

The experience of this brief (8 to 10 module) program was intended to promote awareness of options for these young adults: to encourage participants to discover their interests and how the things they like and enjoy can potentially transform into opportunities for them; that passion equals power; “to encourage continuous growth and development of individuals” (Caffarella, 2002, p. 10).

While McClelland (1965) claimed that the distinguishing trait of entrepreneurs was the need for achievement, Hornaday & Aboud (1971) examined other characteristics of people who succeed. The East-West Center Technology and Development Institute (1997) listed the traits most often referred to when discussing successful people. In my view, many of these can be learned and nurtured, and while common to, are not exclusive to entrepreneurs.

Some of those characteristics are: self-confidence, perseverance, determination, ability to get along with people, responsiveness to suggestions and criticism, resourcefulness, energy, diligence, independence, flexibility, and positive response to challenges (The East-West Center Technology and Development Institute, 1997). The current state of affairs as described in chapters 1 and 2 illustrates some of the apparent gaps that exist and the needs that are growing, as less qualified adults get older. This study aspired to evaluate the effectiveness of a modifiable, more hands-on program that will hopefully enlighten and inspire fellow learners, educators, and policy makers, and make a real difference for this select groups of learners.

In my view, many of the traits, skills, and attitudes that are synonymous with successful entrepreneurs mirror many of the same prerequisites for supporting anyone navigating their way through life in the pursuit of autonomy, self-sufficiency, and fulfillment.

How: The screening process where questionnaires were executed in a friendly interview scenario were also intended to facilitate establishing trust and served as a preamble to the actual workshops. The design and content of this qualitative study project was impacted by the outcome of the screening interviews. They influenced, if not dictated, some of the

content and activities and the kind of expectations from the group that would be appropriate.

The program officially consisted of 8 modules. The design details follow, with samples of modules that can be found in Appendix I. I established a variety of stated objectives for each module. The consensus around what type of business or service or product(s) the participants selected dictated to some degree the evolution of the content of some of the modules developed and used in the project.

The delivery took place through discussions, role-play, case studies, and a variety of group and individual activities. Once the program was completed, post-project interviews and questionnaires, very similar to the initial screening questionnaires, (Appendix G) were conducted with the group and then individually.

Program Design

I estimate that hundreds of hours of preparation, research, and refinement were invested to make the program fully execution ready. Some of the preparation included: handout materials, suggested texts and reading, case-study ideas, icebreakers, and questionnaires, as well as building a supportive base and getting the input and expertise from the various stakeholders. While I was aware of the efforts that would be required, I was still impressed by the workload. “Fully customized classroom training can require as much as one to three days of development for every hour of delivered training” (Goad. 2010, p.68). Interestingly, the reader will note in the observation section and conclusions in chapter 4 that much of the detailed preparation for each module was not used in the actual workshops but simply served as a guideline or reference as the program evolved each week.

Techniques and activities used in the different modules considered and combined some of the different approaches to teaching/learning as defined by Peter Jarvis (2010), i.e., Socratic, didactic, facilitative, and experiential, and the modules varied in their style of delivery. I do not endorse a cookie-cutter approach, and in my view, different learning objectives demand different styles. In fact, one could even say that each module was designed as a program unto itself. This is supported by Caffarella's (2002) recommendations on making the institutional plan work. However, I disagree with her statement about how there is no best way to select and sequence content (p.197). One does have to account for a learner's individual knowledge, ability, and the baggage of experience and predispositions that the variety of participants each brings to a program.

This includes consideration of their various aptitudes and skills as they relate to the chronology and time allocations for certain subject matter and the need for flexibility in planning and structure. Influenced by a constructivist approach, I designed a framework to facilitate this process wherein a learner understands and makes sense of their reality through reflection and relation to who they are and what they have experienced and builds on that,

For example, the first modules explored the definitions of certain terms and concepts, and explained their relevance (i.e., strategy, entrepreneur), helping them to adopt new language and terms and connect the dots as the program or session progressed. “Learning How to Sell and Why” (Module 3), was intentionally planned before learning the “What” (Marketing, Module 4), and follows the order of importance as they relate to the learning objectives. It allowed me to adjust, when for example; there was insufficient time to cover all the subject matter for a particular workshop. This occurred frequently.

Goad's (2010) description of knowledge learning, skills learning, and attitude learning helped to reinforce that this program needed to be designed with emphasis on the affective learning as much as on the cognitive. The Smith and Delahaye (1987) approach was helpful in determining what techniques and content are most appropriate for the total program, as well as each module. Considering the makeup of the participants and mindful of, "What the participants need to know, what they should know and understand and what they could know," (Smith and Delahave, 1987) in the context of the learning objectives, helped me to trim down what could have easily become the longest program in the history of the world.

As I worked to translate the program goals into learning objectives, (Bloom, 1956; Kemp, Morrison & Ross, 1996; Smith & Ragan, 1999), it became apparent which four of the five major categories of learning that the program would focus on:

1. **Acquisition of knowledge:** Basics in calculating and general numeracy, marketing, reading and comprehension,
2. **Enhancement of cognitive skills:** Ability to structure ideas, make and execute a plan, ability to observe and report back and recount with clarity and accuracy.
3. **Strengthening of problem-solving skills and finding capabilities:** Critical thinking in doing case studies, enhanced listening skills, working in groups, following and demonstrating leadership.
4. **Changes in attitude, values, beliefs and or feelings:** Improved self-esteem, self-efficacy through self-awareness, recognition of potential, understanding the nature of compromise, consensus, commitment and ethical behaviour, deferring gratification, and cooperative learning.

Inherent in the lectures, role-plays, and group and individual tasks, certain fundamental and specific learning goals and transferred learning objectives for participants were:

- Interview and interpersonal skills (interviewer and interviewee).
- Leadership skills and working with a team on a shared objective.
- Research skills.
- How to structure their ideas and actions in an organized, creative way.
- How to build a plan.
- Develop analytical skills, critical thinking.
- Some basic math life skills, demonstrating how their application is useful, and therefore worthy of learning (i.e., simple accounting relative to more than just running a business).
 - How to deal with adversity (case studies where obstacles arise, plans go wrong, etc.).
 - Ability to measure and understand the value of a means to an end, deferred gratification (understanding the correlation between what is required to achieve certain objectives and why, in relatable terms).
 - Develop negotiating skills and the value of compromise.
 - Generate awareness of the programs, resources, and support that do exist (i.e., government subsidies, entrepreneurial grants, mentoring programs).
 - Better understanding of what fundamentals are needed to achieve their aspirations (i.e., basic math, trades, life skills) as means to an end.

The workshops focused on facilitating and encouraging:

- An understanding of the fundamentals needed to be an entrepreneur; to own and operate an idea/passion in an enterprising manner; to run a business.
- A grasp of not only business per se but also having ideas and organizing them; making a plan; collaborating in a cooperative environment (community of practice); learning what tools are needed to succeed and where to access them, the resources available; and the value of actually doing something.
- Experiencing the course—with emphasis on experiencing—illustrating and generating options for themselves and encouraging them to discover that their interests and the things they find appealing and enjoyable, can potentially provide an opportunity(s) for them. That passion equals power. To quote Caffarella (2002),” to encourage continuous growth and development of individuals” (p.10).
- The participant’s ability to decipher new skills and acquiring knowledge that is transferable, that translates into competencies, confidence, and higher self-esteem and self-efficacy.
- Discovery through activities that are meaningful, the exploration of the fundamentals of entrepreneurship.
- Access and acquisition of tools that not only help participants to run a business, but most importantly, how to manage their lives. Not only will they understand some of the mechanics of business but will have made the connection (some subconsciously) between business and entrepreneurship, and their approach to life.

- Pursuing and acting on new ideas, making a plan, understanding deferred gratification, learning what tools are needed to succeed, the value of being resourceful, and the value of actually doing something and taking action.
- Improving the participants' self-worth, becoming more aware of and acknowledging some of their aspirations, interests, and potential, and understanding that "passion equals power" and that "nothing happens until someone actually does something". (Jed)

As discussed by Caffarella (2002), and supported by several others, there is sometimes controversy around whether learning objectives should be predominantly those that are easily measurable, therefore stated in behavioural terms, making secondary the less obvious and less quantifiable objectives, such as the affective and attitudinal learning, and acquisition of tacit knowledge. Even such behavioural elements like improved listening and presentation skills can be difficult to measure informally. In my view, just because an objective is more difficult to measure makes it no less important or valuable.

As the planning of this program evolved, I strove to be technically capable, politically aware and ethically responsible (Sork, 1991). To that end, I aspired to ensure that I was current in the knowledge of the more effective techniques and their application, and ensure input and participation from the appropriate base support group that I assembled.

If planners aim to promote social transformation and wish to achieve it in an empowering, highly democratic fashion, then planning requires involving those with a stake in the program, engaging them in conversations to arrive at decisions about

intentions and actions to be taken, and converting those decisions into program features. (Sork, 1991, p.177.)

Being politically effective meant I had to be aware of the roles and influence and interests of those I would be collaborating with and not assume. “Most planning models in adult education assume that practitioners live in a world characterized by cooperative, consensus-seeking people who can reach agreement on complex issues after a suitable amount of civilized discussion” (Sork, 1991, p.194). Sork, Cervero and Wilson (1994, 1996), provide evidence that this assumption is not a valid one and that while negotiation is the most useful approach, mediation and manipulation are also key to dealing with conflicting interests and power struggles.

I am pleased to report that the latter of the two approaches was not even needed, due in large part to the open-minded attitudes and professional courtesy of the Select team. The *techniques by learning outcomes* (Caffarella, 2002) was helpful when trying to stay mindful of how execution should be aligned with the learning outcome objectives for each module.

My next concern was to ensure flexibility/malleability in the modules so that changes could be made midstream based on the input and response to the program from the participants. The reader should note that each module was designed with an outline of some stated objectives but allowed for changes and choice with respect to outings, activities, and selected subject matter relative to the audience and progress, or lack of progress, as the course was delivered.

I also referred to the 16 learning principles for effective training as per Goad (2010, p. 53). Adults learn by doing, use realistic examples, adults relate their learning to what they already know, conduct the training in an informal environment, variety is the spice of life, remove the fear factor, serve as the facilitator of the learning process, inform learners of the

learning objectives, practice makes perfect, guide and prompt; do not tell, give feedback, apply transfer of training, relate all activities to the learning objectives, make a good first impression, show enthusiasm, use repetition.

While some of these principles may seem very obvious, it was still important to consider them as the detail around execution of each module was developed. Caffarella's (2002) examples of techniques (p.176) served to validate some of the ideas and techniques I planned for the modules (i.e., problem-based learning, reflective practice, role-playing, group discussion, lecture, face-to-face, case studies, etc.). It was also important to be wary of my tendency to try and accomplish too much, thereby jeopardizing doing anything adequately. Basically, a "less is more" approach was wise to address this. I found Caffarella's Importance Criteria table (p.142) helpful in being more selective about what the priorities could be.

As an extra precaution, it was also imperative to make sure to clearly understand the objectives of each module and to utilize the correct language. Hillier suggests using the right verbs to define learning outcomes (p.91).

Data collection

To maximize the learnings, I chose to triangulate the data by summarizing the responses and highlights under common themes derived from extensive review and some transcription of recordings, video and module/workshop notes and insights.

This study was qualitative and ethnographic in its approach and I used several means of data collection including observation, interview, and some questionnaires. Within 24 hours of each workshop, observations were recorded and documented and reconciled with the often-limited notes that I did my best to record during the actual sessions. As mentioned in the notes

from Modules 2 and 5, the occasions where Loric assisted with facilitation and animation, freed me up to be able to observe and better record notes during the actual workshops.

I also referred to Loric, as I did periodically with the Select staff, to validate my observations concerns and impressions. This helped me to manage my expectations of the group members and to pivot, adjust and adapt accordingly. I had the pleasure of meeting Loric in 2015 and an ensuing friendship was formed after spending a week together at the international program, "Common Purpose Global Leadership Experience."

Loric, while only 25 years of age, has successfully influenced the design and execution of a different and somewhat more templated, co-op entrepreneurship program with the YMCA. His observations, comparisons, and questions were very insightful. In addition, occasionally sharing my weekly observations with him, combined with his more staggered involvement with the team allowed for qualitative observations on where, how, and if behaviours and attitudes etc., did or did not change, and how and if individual roles evolved over the 9 weeks.

In short, I employed three of the four approaches to data collection that Anderson (1998, p.164) outlines, including:

- Non-personal interaction with a subject who provides data tools including multiple- choice questionnaires.
 - Personal interaction with a subject who provides data taken from individual and group interviews.
 - Observation, with perspective from both participants and experts. This includes input from teachers, monitors, social workers, and caseworkers.

Mindful of Moustakas' (1994) five phases of qualitative data analysis, the study established up front a process to ensure sufficient triangulation of the data coming from different sources. The five simple steps I used for this study were:

1. Design and deliver course.
2. Gather data and observational input.
3. Review and reflect.
4. Validate and further data collection.
5. Explain and synthesize.

The interview questionnaires used were multiple-choice with distinct choices to facilitate the analysis and open-ended questions. A sort of informal personality assessment through interviews helped me understand the learner's self-concept, self-efficacy, and self-esteem levels and more non-cognitive areas such as attitudes, values, and interests. Likert-type rating scales would also be used to help measure the participants' more affective traits (McMillan, 2012).

In an ideal world, I would have liked to compare the effectiveness of certain existing programs with that of MYLYB, establishing a baseline on some fundamental values, attitudes, skills, and literacy levels of the participants at the outset via questionnaires and then similar measures and exercises upon completion of a program. The goal would simply be to better track and measure more long-term progress and changes in behaviour. Evaluating the impact of certain transferred learnings is obviously easier than others, i.e., the ability to write a resume, read a plan, organize ideas etc., versus the less measureable changed ethical or moral behaviour. With respect to ensuring and leveraging the flexibility built into MYLYB, there was as much

emphasis on the formative as the summative approach to evaluation. (Kirkpatrick, 2007; Philips, 1996).

Limitations

- Some of my concerns for potential bias were addressed by involving objective observers to provide some input of the data. I also validated the integrity of the questionnaires and other data collection tools used. As mentioned in the workshop notes (April 13), I decided to tag certain observations and concerns and questions so that I could validate afterwards with Loric and staff who provided support.
- Aware of the challenges of facilitating and observing at the same time, I made use of recordings, some assistance from an objective facilitator, and disciplined post-module note taking to ensure satisfactory recording of accurate data.
- The techniques, design, and results for the participants in this program are not necessarily generalizable to other entrepreneurship training programs.

CHAPTER IV

The Program Delivery

This chapter provides an overview of the screening interviews, followed by the actual delivery of the weekly workshops. The highlights draw from notes documenting each workshop, some of what actually occurred, and some of what was learned. This is followed by the post-program interviews with learners and staff, and includes some excerpts from transcribed recorded sessions.

I appreciate the reader's patience, as I took the liberty of using a somewhat storytelling and note sharing approach to describe what I found to be a stimulating, enlightening, and informative series of events. I am so glad that I was disciplined with respect to taking notes, which were vital in the process of assembling the thesis, and quite frankly, were also crucial to the actual learning process and my ability to draw any sound conclusions.

Screening the Candidates

From the perspective of both an educator and a parent of a child with learning challenges, meeting with each of the candidates was enlightening and inspiring. Despite their apparent enthusiasm about the program, only four of the candidates responded to my initial request for them to apply via email with a paragraph explaining why they were interested in entrepreneurship.

As was explained by the teaching staff, many of these young people hesitated due to lack of confidence, but not lack of interest. They recommended that I not discount interviewing anyone who had only expressed their interest verbally, and I did not.

Any disappointment on my part was quickly dispelled by the realization that any success or growth experienced by the selected participants would likely be in small increments; that it was potentially the sum of many little victories (such as even applying by email) that would contribute to improving their self-efficacy, self-esteem, and confidence levels. It reinforced the concept that empowerment does not occur with the flip of a switch; it is a process, maybe even comparable to physical training, in which slowly building up one's muscles and stamina prepares one for a physical undertaking.

On Wednesday, March 23, I spent 6 hours meeting with and interviewing the ten candidates. My tendency to speak up to people was not lost on these young people as I greeted them with a firm handshake, a welcome, and made certain to maintain appropriate eye contact. I informed them all that there was limited space in the workshops and that the interview was more of a conversation with no right or wrong answers, a great chance for me to get to know them and for them to know themselves.

On average the interviews lasted 25 minutes, and based on the guideline I had prepared, I summed up each candidate's eligibility with a grade from 1 to 10 for both skills/competencies and attitude. This was followed by a meeting with their teachers and the Gene, the d'équipe where we compared notes and very easily arrived at a decision on which six were most capable and could most benefit from the MYLYB opportunity.

The candidates selected (names changed for anonymity) were:

1. **Sandra** (24) presented with a great appreciation (OCD) for organizing things (kitchens, closets, workspaces, etc.), and viewed this as a skill and a service that she could provide, and she also enjoyed baking as a vocation. She is currently in the kitchen/cooking training program. She has a strong desire to learn new things and was

highly motivated to improve her vocational skills and acquire the skills and know-how to eventually participate in a future entrepreneurial endeavour. This could be alone or with her older sister or a friend. She came across as very content with her life, and admired passion and a strong work ethic in people (e.g., Kelly Clarkson, her dad).

Areas that she would like to work on were improving reading comprehension skills, fluency in French, and overall confidence levels. Her stated strengths were passion for, helping others, and willingness to learn.

2. Anne (26) presented with a desire to be self-employed and start her own business. She is also currently in the kitchen/cooking training program and was worried that attending the workshop might detract from this. She expressed interest in learning the “steps” for starting a business, with an emphasis on hiring and job descriptions, and she enjoys coaching and showing people new tasks.

She viewed entrepreneurship as a means to “managing her own life” and “independence,” and enjoyed memorizing, practicing, and improving at things. She expressed admiration for Barack Obama, her parents, sisters, and grandparents for their strength, integrity, and in the case of family, the support they have provided her.

Areas that she would like to work on were managing her stress levels, particularly when it comes to academics, improving her public speaking, drawing and designing abilities, and becoming more comfortable socially, especially less shy in new situations.

Her stated strengths were the ability to articulate, be outgoing, committed, and do things “from the heart.”

3. Nick (22) was very interested in starting his own business and being his own boss, and he hoped his passion for antiques could translate into a business. He is good with his

hands, expressed the need to be active, and works as a groundskeeper at John Abbott 3 days per week.

He admires Muhammad Ali for his boxing achievements, and he appreciates and engages in the martial arts. He tends to be claustrophobic and finds it hard to sit in one place for long periods. He is worried about his difficulty with reading comprehension, but believes he compensates with his excellent numeracy skills (autistic tendencies?). He loves selling, is a hard worker, wants to help others, and is really motivated to take this workshop.

4. Kevin (23) likes office-related work activities and wants to be self-employed. He likes learning new things.

He admires Barack Obama, Tom Brady (sports), and his mom, who is a nurse. He experienced some behavioural challenges, which had him trying several different schools, and is now back at Select and hopeful.

He would like to become a quicker learner, and he has difficulty with memorizing and mastering certain routines. He is very polite and motivated to participate in the workshops and prefers work over school.

5. Harry (23) finds the money and vacations appealing about business. He also wants to learn about hiring and managing people. Fast food and dog grooming are businesses that interest him.

He is uncomfortable with multitasking and prefers to concentrate on one thing at a time; he enjoys learning new things and is preoccupied with finding employment and independence.

He worries about being laughed at and ridiculed when it comes to learning in a group. He states that he is strong and flexible (physically), has a positive attitude, and is a hard worker.

6. Natalie (24) enjoys making things, innovating, production, baking, and the restaurant business. She also likes service-type activities, such as hostessing and waiting tables. She is concerned about not catching on to things quickly enough, and finds that pressure or being rushed makes her uncomfortable, as does staying on task when stressed (ADHD).

She likes cooking and baking, music, and the idea of coming up with a new idea and then selling it. She is motivated, enjoys a sense of achievement, and is open to new things. She wants to learn how to budget and manage funds, but fears quizzes and tests. She admires her dad because of what and how he builds things and renovates. She considers herself helpful and curious.

Clear common themes surfaced during the interviews. Coincidentally, a couple of weeks after these interviews, I was invited to present at a public assembly for the YMCA on the subject of the value and importance of public programs for challenged youth and adults. I could not resist the opportunity to refer to my recent experiences and I shared two of the common themes that really impressed me.

First, the candidates all expressed concern about how their respective challenges (ADHD, shyness, low literacy levels, etc.) and how they might interfere with or jeopardize not only their own individual success but also the success of the team, with the *latter* being paramount.

Second, they all expressed a genuine desire to achieve independence, autonomy, employment, social opportunities, and friends—seemingly simple aspirations. It struck me that

so many of the people I encounter in life possess or have comparatively easy access to the things that these students aspired to and longed for, yet these are the things that people seem to complain about the most. Quite frankly, these courageous young adults, their compassion for one another, and their simple goals inspired me. I was further motivated at the prospect of developing and delivering and testing ideas and tools that could potentially empower them, thereby enhancing their much-deserved chances of success.

During the brainstorm session in Module 1 on what projects or business they might build, several of their suggestions spoke to the needs of youth with special needs, such as programs after school and in the evenings.

In retrospect, during the individual interviews it would have been nice to solicit more personal preferences and information by prompting more questions from them about their expectations of the workshops. However, the first module planned this as a group exercise, so I guess I preferred to avoid making the interviews too lengthy or too similar to the actual workshop.

Modules: Workshop Notes

March 30: Module 1—Breaking the ice and brainstorming business ideas. After a few late arrivals, the first session began with a very receptive group, whose facial expressions and posture demonstrated their anticipation and curiosity. Happily, most of the expectations that we brainstormed were aligned with elements of the actual program that I had envisioned.

Their expectations were:

- Building a sustainable business or project.
- Learning how to make a plan, schedules, etc.
- Learning about marketing.

- Learning about budgeting, accounting, the value of money.
- Hoping that the course would be entertaining.
- Learning about sales, presentation, and communication skills.
- Management (people, hiring, human resources).
- Advertising.

The ice-breaker (“If” questions activity) was well received, with only time for three questions, and they stayed in a group of six. It was a good activity for familiarizing everyone. (For example, “If you could be an animal, what would it be and why?” “If you could visit any country in the world, where would you go and why?” “If you could visit with any person alive or dead, who would it be and why?”)

We discussed how an idea can transform into a company or a project, and how a need or cause is very often the origin of an idea. We broke up into two groups of three to discuss business ideas. Here are a few of the ideas they suggested:

- Develop an after-school and/or evening program for youth who have special needs. (It was pointed out by them that while some programs may exist in the Montreal West Island, they **do not** in the Pointe St. Charles and Lachine and LaSalle areas.)
- Identify a pet store that is accessible to and encourages young people with special needs to visit and interact with animals.
- Develop an after-school sports activities program for youth who have special needs.
- Start a baking enterprise such as cake pops and mug cakes.

- Learn how to make homemade shampoo, conditioner, and soap (healthier!) and market them.

Lack of time interrupted the brainstorming session. Their homework was to come back with their favourites the following week, which they would present to each other for an exercise in listening skills, and then we would distil the ideas, discuss their merit, etc. Here is some of what occurred:

Nick quietly requested Sandra for assistance with writing the replies to the “If” questions and Nick made sure to involve Kevin in the presentation of business ideas, seemingly helping Kevin to be engaged in the process. Natalie was coaxed out of her shell to take part in discussions. Harry was well focused and respectful of all participants and with prompting, Anne took part in the discussions.

The use of direct eye contact, minimal encouraging prompts, paraphrasing the students, and following with questions effectively elicited discussion and interaction from the group. Everyone was generally respectful and attentive to one another. I was encouraged by what I overheard as they were dismissed and they walked down the hall and bantered amongst themselves (“that was interesting,” “yeah, that was great,” “yeah, fun, eh,” “cool,” etc.).

March 30-Reflections

Need for better time management. I have to coach them towards an idea, concept, or project that is feasible and meets the collective expectations. Wherever possible in the future I would leverage having Loric assist with lengthier group work and tasks. I will also do an individual concerns and positive expectations inventory/questionnaire.

April 6: Module 2—Learning about compromise, consensus, collaboration, listening skills, and selecting business project. Loric joined us for this session. Participants were punctual and ready to go, taking their same seats as week one. There was a collective enthusiasm and interest, and they were surprisingly current and ready, despite the fact that a week had passed since our first workshop. Anne was immediately more expressive than in week one (comfort level), and during the process for a desert island decision-making type of activity led by Loric all the participants were very attentive and responsive to him, as they were to each other.

In group 1, Nick made an individual effort and demonstrated the ability to read/decipher certain basics that were written on the sheet versus automatically requesting help as he had done the first week (autonomy). Sandra took a leadership role, and Anne—while still quite characteristically quiet and the least vocal—participated more than during week one and benefitted from some coaxing from facilitators. In group 2, Natalie, while also shy, participated well. Harry was predictably full of life and participated actively, and Kevin, while still slower to respond than others, did contribute and appeared engaged.

During the desert island decision-making activity, we observed that the groups were initially shy, and more so when the facilitators were close by, so Loric and I backed off. During the exchanges regarding what items they would keep on the desert island, the participants were engaged, they explained their positions, and the compromise within the groups of three went very smoothly with good, logical explanations and rationales for their decisions.

When the two groups of three reconvened and confronted each other, they shared and recognized what they had in common—which items they all believed in—and then reviewed and

established criteria around why these things were important (Sandra took the lead), with one team switching from choosing a revolver to recognizing that matches were more necessary.

While there were good exchanges and good compromise, there may have been somewhat of a lack of commitment, and the arguments for a different position were very easily accepted. In other words, the members of one team seemed quite easily influenced by the other members' position. As the course continued it was interesting to see if participants defended their convictions more wholeheartedly and would be less accommodating and agreeable, or if they would continue to acquiesce quite easily.

Listening skills. In this activity, the representations were rather brief, and maybe we as the facilitators should have done less prompting, as we seemed to miss the *why* behind their ideas. In other words, the presentees did a good job of representing the presenter's ideas, but with very little depth, and had the facilitators asked fewer questions, maybe we would have been able to get more from them. I quickly started to realize how important it is to temper facilitating in terms of being selective with prompts and questions, very similar to when in a counselling role. I decided that we would revisit this exercise when and if we got to do the sales-role activity.

April 6- Reflections

More time should be committed to this activity, and we should allow the buyers to comment on what the sellers presented in more detail, have less facilitation or involvement by leaders (me), but encourage more enquiry from the group. I also decided to make more time for activities that help promote participants' self-awareness.

Choosing the team business/project. This process went very well as we distilled several ideas, many that had been presented the week prior. They tentatively arrived at the consensus that an event—small and simple and something that could be done annually—would be appealing for a project, allowing them to potentially include more than one of the many good ideas that they had been considering. I realized that there were lots of details to discuss next session, and that the goal may not require raising funds but being able to finance an annual event like this on an ongoing basis. We could call it the “Select Entrepreneur Showcase,” for example.

In Module 3, we would have to simplify and narrow the options and ensure that we were not spreading ourselves too thin. Are we working with cakes or with shampoo and soap products, or both? Maybe we take a couple of products and/or ideas for the event—and does it really have to be an event? We would have to vet the ideas further and revisit their desire to present to a dragons’ den panel. This may be too much of an undertaking, especially if they decide they also want to do it in front of the full school. Module 3 planning and accountabilities will provide some clarity, so I suggested leaving the dragons’ den as an option for them to decide on later.

April 6- Reflections

At this point, I started realizing that an eight-week course doesn’t necessarily change behaviour and that I should not expect or seek any revelations, but rather do my best to create an environment that provides an opportunity for these young adults to see “what could be” as much as “what is.” From a research perspective, the course should simply generate opportunities and offer activities and exercises through which participants perhaps recognize that they are more capable than they might have believed, the chance for them to feel valued, to

successfully step out of their comfort zones, to believe in themselves, and to journey towards empowerment and self-confidence.

This is a complex journey, and I was pleased with how quickly I had become at ease with the responsibilities of designing and delivering and facilitating this fledgling program. It was becoming equally apparent, however, that my concerns around potential time management issues with respect to observing and evaluating while simultaneously facilitating (and all that that entails) were well founded.

In an attempt to address the aforementioned concerns the following ideas were recorded in my notes, for consideration in the subsequent modules

1. Involve Loric more fully. The week that he facilitated an activity that we collaborated on designing provided me with another important perspective (mine, but as more of an observer). It also provided me with access to his objective perspective.
2. To ensure capturing more of the qualitative data that I missed when preoccupied with the predictable expectations of facilitating, I considered that with the participants' approval, I would record some future modules.
3. I carried out a mid-project assessment by distributing a questionnaire to get some real-time insight into the participants' current mindset (Appendix F).
4. I further realized that the sporadic feedback from participants, regular teachers and mentors, and staff during the program, combined with post-program completion interviews, would also provide critical data and perspective.
5. I continued to recognize that workshops delivered over such a short period of time cannot be expected to generate earth-shattering results. It was however the experience of

the trial and error and the “defeats” and disappointments in the process that I was sure would contribute to their growth and the resiliency of their self-efficacy.

Next session homework. For the learners, inventory/questionnaires that they had been assigned and had to think further about their event and business ideas for the following week. For Jed, needed to make new PowerPoint slides more succinct and with a bigger font. Loric had observed that some of the team had trouble following the content of the slides.

April 13: Module 3—The 3 Ps; Product, Positioning, Price, and basic marketing

As noted in April 18 reflections, I decided to highlight/tag (*) and make side notes about certain observations or curiosities to be validated with Select staff later and to stay mindful of them as activities were designed and executed over the next weeks.

As I arrived at the school, Nick ran into me in the hall and immediately and voluntarily informed me that he had accidentally destroyed the previous week’s form for the questions inventory, and appeared concerned and apologetic. (*Will enquire with teachers as to his typical behaviour when it comes to follow-ups and responsibility. Is he usually so concerned and conscientious?) Everyone arrived on time, and Harry had also forgotten his inventory at home and was apologetic. I did a quick review/résumé of the previous week’s activities and conclusions and then divided them into two groups of three to talk about their concerns and positive expectations aligned with the inventory sheet assignment. I arbitrarily mixed the groups, putting Sandra, Natalie, and Harry in one group, and Nick, Anne, and Kevin in the second group. Nick was very unhappy with this, and proceeded to sulk for the first few minutes during the exercise.

In group 1, Sandra was predictably in a leadership role; however, Natalie demonstrated some signs of leadership as well. (*How does this compare with their behaviour outside of

workshop?) Group 2 struggled with Nick while he slowly let his disapproval dissipate and proceeded to become engaged. He was less apt to try to read the inventory list on his own, but I pointed out how the week prior, he had read the desert island list very well. So with some coaxing, he made a successful attempt to review the inventory list with his teammates. (*Have to monitor any literacy progress outside of workshops also.)

Despite a lack of chemistry in group 2, both groups made progress in discussing their ideas and opinions and explaining why. After reconvening to discuss and determine project direction, they decided to forgo the event idea, but they still wanted to tackle launching two products, which presented obvious complications and challenges. I worked hard as a facilitator to manage my interventions so that they would reach conclusions on their own. I led them in an overview of the upcoming needs, responsibilities, and challenges of launching a product, and it became evident to them on their own (with some suggestions from Sandra and Natalie) that the launch of two projects would be too complicated, and they decided on just one: “Mug/Cake Pops.”

I asked them to congregate into one group of six without my help, and, to discuss the first of the 3 P’s: Product (i.e., product, positioning, and price). Sandra took the lead, made notes, and requested votes frequently to make decisions, and they demonstrated a keen sense of democracy. Kevin was much more participative as well. Anne was much more vocal, and everyone continued to be quite agreeable and cohesive as a team. Enthusiasm grew as we/they planned around a main idea, “Cake pops and/or Mug of cake,” anticipating the next few workshops and the challenging deadlines they/we would have to meet.

I introduced the concept of mission statements and slogans, and as part of the homework they were to come back with ideas for the next week. Harry introduced the idea of, “Just eat it!”

based on Nike's "Just do it," which was very well received by the team (myself included). They unanimously voted that they would like to meet the challenges of participating in a dragons' den experience. They were also increasingly cognizant of the workload and responsibilities if this project was to be achieved in the remaining five weeks. It would be interesting to see how groups and individuals rose to meet the challenges (i.e., presentations, preparation, assignment of roles, responsibilities). I had to make sure to allow the team the freedom to use their newly acquired decision-making skills and leverage their confidence in each other to contribute to the task of allocating individual responsibilities.

Planning for the next session included refining the plan for the remainder of the program, specifying the next steps by date, and considering the possibility that not all objectives would be achieved in the remaining timeframe. It became clear that the process, the content and chronology of the program was as important as the delivery and facilitation of the modules (workshops).

April 18: Mid-program Reflections.

As the weeks flew by, so did the time I had remaining with this group, and it became increasingly important to structure the workshop activities and facilitation to maximize effectiveness and efficiency in providing learning and growth opportunities for the individual participants. Self-awareness and acknowledgment of personal challenges is key to personal development, so by focusing more on understanding individual needs and opportunities, I hoped to improve the chances of eliciting/effecting some real change during the program. Activities and approach have to be relevant to participants.

Loric and I reviewed my views and concerns, and combined with his observations and some stimulating exchanges, I added and tagged some brief comments incremental to the

original participant profiles from the screening that described them and their respective opportunities for growth. Most important is that these insights influenced the content and approach for the next modules.

There does seem to exist in the group the potential for diminished self-representation and assertiveness and fear of confrontation, aversion to risk or stepping out of their respective comfort zones. This was evident in the design of future activities and my approach to facilitating. For example, I decided to use increased and random roundtable requests for input so that everyone had frequent chances to speak their mind; I requested that they demonstrate and explain their positions and personal posture; I used sales activities and listening-skill activities and challenging role plays. The dragons' den activity also presented an opportunity for everyone to be involved and invested, including in areas that are ordinarily less comfortable for some team members.

As new information arose through continued observations, better understanding of the learners and through conversations I had with the teaching staff, I added to the original profiles and I made sure to continue referring to these profiles when reviewing session and planning activities.

1. Sandra: Demonstrates kind leadership, has an accommodating nature, and is very capable and organized. Potential to be too accommodating; may hesitate to demand from others. Jean Yves, (social worker who interacts with the students) and Samuel, (head of the kitchen program), confirmed.

2. Anne: Continues to be low profile, soft-spoken, composed, and tactful. Seems to present with a quiet strength, hampered by insecurity. Individual assignments and

roundtable may help her to shine and step out of her quiet, unassuming comfort zone.

Samuel reports seeing progress (more outgoing behaviour), and explained that she has a quick learning curve when she finds herself in a comfortable environment.

3. Nick: Not overly compromising, but agreeable. He knows what he knows, doesn't hide it, and appears to use it as sort of a protective shield. Constantly seeks validation and uses victimization (e.g., his neighbourhood, exposure to alcoholism, poor, can't read, etc.). His sense of resignation could be addressed through activities that demonstrate how defeat in an activity is not defeat in itself. In other words, it might be important for him to learn about and experience not succeeding to help him be successful; stepping out of his comfort zone. J. S. says he has experienced much failure in his life (was neglected, isolated and abused throughout primary school for years). He needs to succeed to build up his self-esteem and a more resilient self-efficacy (Bandura 1988). Jenny (teaches four participants not in the kitchen program), says he is very street-smart and intuitive.

4. Kevin: Limited ability to express himself, but shows the desire to do so; for example, in Module 2, where he verbalized resistance to eliminate an idea when choosing the list of items for the desert island. Difficult to read his level of engagement and comprehension. Individual assignments and roundtable may help him to shine and step out of his comfort zone. Jean Yves and Jenny in full agreement that we all have to go deeper to bring out his potential!

5. Harry: Able to express himself; appears engaged, but almost too happy. Roundtable and accountabilities will validate the degree of his interest, focus, and commitment to the group. Presents as "just happy to be there." Teachers suggest he is privileged and assumes/takes things for granted. J. S. explained that he appreciates being

selected for MYLYB, feels privileged. I will leverage that to elicit/solicit more contribution and engagement from him. Jenny explained that he is very capable, but smart enough to do the minimum.

6. Natalie: Continues to be shy, avoids leaving comfort zone, but showing initiative in short periods (she was afraid to ask a bus driver for assistance and passed her stop and drove for a significant period of time). Should create opportunities for her to need to seek assistance or take a strong position. J. S. explains that her first reflex is not to ask for help. Jenny says she does not.

April 20: Module 4—The value of a plan, mission statement, distribution of tasks.

Before the workshop, I was able to meet with Samuel, Jenny and Jean Yves to validate and receive incremental input with respect to each of the participants (i.e., notes in April 18). All three educators showed interest, were kind, very accessible and quick to help, and were easily scheduled for post-program interviews in June.

Everyone was on time at the workshop and ready to go. Nick quickly produced and presented to me the homework that had not been done/lost the week before, as well as recipe suggestions and slogans. I acknowledged and recognized his good work, but I asked him to keep it until class began. I gave them a few seconds to prepare and then I did a roundtable, asking everyone for one positive thing that happened to them since we last met. (Kevin joined a new church, and he expressed some real enthusiasm about being part of this new group and how welcome he felt. Harry, attended Monster Jam. Other examples were cooking, family visit, etc. Natalie, no answer.)

We then proceeded with a group discussion on the importance and value of planning. I asked each of them to think of an example where making a plan or having a plan was helpful or

even necessary. Then I did a roundtable for input. (Housecleaning, getting ready for school, work, and vacations were examples of replies.) We talked about what can happen when we don't have a plan: forget things; oversights; disorganization; and sometimes, avoidable stress. Once again there was a team reality check with respect to not having sufficient time to achieve all the objectives inherent in building and structuring a business project. There continued to be a struggle between achieving the objectives that they were so excited about and also allowing them adequate time to experience, learn, and grow through the activities. It was not just about achieving the end goal; it was about the *journey becoming the destination*.

The group was consistently agreeable, however, by allowing at least half the class time to be dedicated to independent group work, I was better able to observe them, and despite their previously noted accommodating nature, they did debate more vigorously and discuss and determine the number of recipes, ingredients, quantities, and timing. The first brainstorm with me involved was on what actions were needed to achieve their objectives, many of which needed revisiting and reinforced the need for a mission statement.

Kevin volunteered to write the ideas on a flip chart, and everyone contributed. Harry was quiet, Anne increasingly vocal, and Natalie still needed prompting. In independent group work however, she became increasingly engaged and participative, versus when I was leading (maybe she felt less on the spot). I had to redirect Sandra's input on a couple of occasions to allow for Harry, Kevin, and Natalie et al. to be able to participate more. Anne was very vocal. Nick was very anxious about the presentation for dragons' den.

I then put them in their workgroup absent of me to brainstorm on an action plan, next steps, and to make some important decisions. Anne and Harry were the voices of reason, and the group members demonstrated critical thinking as they revisited the complexity of the products

and decided about the things they would need: locale for production, an oven versus no oven for production, how many flavours/recipes, SKUs (stock keeping units), timing, etc. Kevin inquired as to how complicated making cake pops would be. They demonstrated problem-solving skills as they looked at pricing and timing. Generally they were still all very agreeable, BUT there were good challenges regarding feasibility, complexity, and cost. I did make an attempt to challenge and enquire and revalidate if everyone was in agreement and to elicit any latent disapproval, of which there was little.

The next brainstorm session for them concerned such things as deciding on the company name and slogan, and they had to finalize recipes and assign roles and responsibilities. They employed the same numbering system that I had employed to achieve consensus when we chose our business project, and they decided on the name “**King and Queen Cake Pops Company.**”

I was glad to see that they had retained and decided to use the decision-making process (i.e., a tool!). I jumped in sporadically with some roundtable questions to ensure that everybody was staying involved. When I asked Kevin to remind me what the two recipes were, he was only able to tell me one. This seemed to validate concerns that he sometimes understands or retains less than the impression he gives (validated by teachers). The input of the staff was helpful in that I was able to triangulate my observations and Loric’s input with the teacher’s insight.

Overall, there was pretty good participation and distribution of tasks by the entire group. I did have to be involved to ensure that *everyone* had something to do, with agreement on the following:

- There would be sharing and communication and follow-ups post-workshop. I was tasked with sending a follow-up list based on the flip chart. Harry and Kevin announced that they would work on the design and logos during computer class that afternoon.

There was good enthusiasm to work together after hours to achieve their tasks (this despite some email/technology accessibility challenges).

- Natalie and Sandra to follow up with Nick to produce final recipes ingredient needs for costing and sourcing.
- Anne and Sandra were to secure location for production, and take an important role in structuring the actual manufacturing.
- Harry was to draft invitation to dragons' for presentation (Module 8).
- Harry and Kevin were to provide drafts of fonts, logos, and designs for marketing.

Finally, everyone was to revisit how many cakes to produce, think of an idea for labels, what the slogans would be, and what the market can bear with respect to pricing. Nick very astutely brought up the idea of price parity with other similar products, which we discussed as a group.

Everyone was enthused, motivated, and cohesive. I almost felt hesitant or guilty to be celebrating this, since I wasn't exactly sure why it was happening. I asked myself if I was truly pushing them out of their comfort zones. As I discussed with their teachers, I am so much more accustomed to working with and trying to help dysfunctional groups who lack trust and cohesion and direction in their teams, so I couldn't help but be pleased with the way this group was working together. Once again, it appears that it was much more a lack of confidence and trust in themselves that presented opportunities for their growth versus making the group work as a unit. On the other hand, maybe I was missing the forest for the trees; maybe the nature of the activities, theme, their level of interest and motivation, and facilitation of the workshops was

what contributed to an environment where these young learners excelled, and thrived as a group and as individuals.

Maybe the approach of MYLYB *was* conducive to participants stepping out of their comfort zones and growing as individuals as well, and I should not overanalyze or be concerned with or discount the value of the cohesion and team spirit that I was observing. Samuel had reported that in the right context, Anne does have a very quick learning curve, and when her confidence level rises, so does her engagement and participation, which seemed to be what I was witnessing. Perhaps this community of practice was proving effective.

April 20, Reflections

I wanted to be cautious about over analysis and over measurement and make sure that as a result of concentrating on pursuing specific outcomes or deliverables and clear examples of learning and growth that I did not miss out on the progress and positives that might be occurring along the way. This program might quite simply demonstrate that the experiential nature of the activities and interest and motivation that entrepreneurship garners is sufficient to facilitate growth and teamwork and provide a comfortable place for learners to test their abilities and personal potential. Recommendations and refinements might very well help these types of programs evolve and become even more effective.

During discussion with Loric, I emphasized my conscious decision to avoid having any preconceived ideas of outcomes to avoid bias, and how the research element of my thesis was more about learning by doing than proving anything. People interacting with each other create change, not programs and program goals. However, appropriately structured

programs/environments/scenarios can support the creation of a community of practice that facilitates people affecting people so that real growth and change can occur.

I also believe that sustainable growth has a lot to do with how people see and feel about themselves as individuals so that they can carry their learning forward. This emphasizes the need to allow sufficient time for the team to interact, disagree, reflect, and challenge each other and themselves.

Setting the team up for success did not necessarily have to demand achievement of all the expected milestones, which included creating and producing a finished product, advertising it, selling it, and presenting to a mock dragons' den, to name just a few. This means, from an execution standpoint, that while I did have to ensure a semblance of project completion, which meant structuring the group modules with time constraints and clear objectives, I should not lose sight of how learnings take place during the journey itself, thereby limiting the group and myself to focusing on specific deliverables.

Planning for the next session included providing the participants with *sample mission statements*, touching base with everyone, adjusting the timeline and providing everyone with copies of that. The participants would need a final list of ingredients and details as to how to acquire them as well as how to disseminate information and marketing about the dragons' den. Jed and Loric divided the tasks to be done.

April 27: Module 5 —Organizing, accountability and responsibility. Everyone (except Kevin, who slept in) was on time and raring to go. I used Loric's presence as a pretext to evaluate the group's retention and recounting skills by asking them to bring Loric up to date. Surprisingly, Natalie was the first to volunteer information, when she usually is quietest when facing forward in a class versus in a work group situation. Anne was increasingly engaged and

provided input, and collectively and individually everyone contributed, except Harry, who was quiet, and Kevin, who was late. They recalled and recounted discussion around the value of a plan, action plan, mission statements, marketing slogans, and needs and other details that had been discussed in the week prior.

With respect to assigned follow-ups, there was some confusion around what was supposed to be done particularly by Nick and Kevin, and they showed genuine concern about this. Kevin took the initiative to text Sandra for clarification, but he tried to delegate his tasks to her because he was unclear and worried, which was indicative of a lack of confidence, and in some ways he was giving up. They all agreed on how important clear communication is in all areas of one's life, and to never hesitate to request clarification to make sure that they understand.

With some prompting from Loric, they turned their desks to face each other and work more effectively as a group to decide on the most appropriate next steps. Confronted with some agenda conflicts and timeline issues, they agreed (Sandra prompting) that dividing and conquering was the best method. Harry and Natalie appeared comfortable with their personal decision to forgo part of the production commitment of the next week to attend a fundraiser bowlathon. The others were okay with this, and all committed to working the production May 4, with Harry and Natalie joining them at noon upon their return. The team also agreed that we needed to acquire all ingredients and materials that day to make sure they were ready for production needs, and that only some of the team could accompany me to the stores for this task.

We divided into two groups. Loric took the production team to determine all needs, costs, ounces-to-gram conversions, etc., and I took Kevin and Harry (the marketing team) to work on the invitation to dragons' (which Harry had worked on as a follow-up), mission

statement, flyers, design, slogans, etc. Everyone understood the need for relying on and trusting each other to make certain decisions and do certain tasks on behalf of the group. They also understood the importance of reconvening, returning to the group to seek approval for what they had done and what they were suggesting. All members of the team appeared to be very at ease with changing dates and moving things around.

Anne had to go see Samuel twice to confirm times and needs for production, because her report back to the team was not clear. My first reaction was to go and meet Samuel myself instead of resending her.

April 27-Reflection

I fear this is often the case, where too much is done for them rather than by them. I was potentially guilty of perpetuating this, and I had to be mindful of this: to help them to help themselves, pushing matters back to them versus jumping to help by doing it myself.

Harry and Kevin were quick to volunteer to do some work that afternoon on invitations and design, and to meet me next Monday to move some marketing initiatives ahead (Harry sent me a draft at the end of the day via email). Adjustments were made regarding afternoon schedules to accommodate post-lunch kitchen needs (Anne volunteered) and shopping for materials, etc. Routine is very often an important part of the lives of many of these young people, and the repetition and regularity is often comforting. Taking them out of this comfort zone and watching them adapt and adjust was very encouraging.

Shopping. Natalie, Nick and Sandra were all very enthusiastic and resourceful, as Sandra and Nick didn't hesitate to ask store personnel for things, and they were all very price- and budget-aware and responsible. Natalie was the most agreeable (too much so), and while she

might appear to be very able-bodied and minded, I can see how in public situations her confidence levels diminish and her vulnerability increases. It was a bit of a “reality check,” since despite her evolution in the MYLYB group, when she is outside of her comfort zone, she remains very much a follower and lacks the confidence to enquire, request, and validate things.

April 27-Reflection

I cannot help but relate to this, as my wife and I battle with our need to increase opportunities for our own son to experience autonomy, to face and deal with adversity and problem-solving situations outside of the home. Our dilemma is so often our very justified concern for his safety and some of the inherent and serious risks in letting him go it on his own.

Lack of time continued to be a factor, as both Loric and I were often forced to keep things moving versus leveraging the time for them to appreciate and fully benefit from the opportunities to employ critical thinking and resolve things more independently. There continued to be a struggle about achieving project success at the end even if it was to the detriment of the valuable experiences that they might miss along the journey. It basically came down to how deadlines can influence activity and opportunity.

Loric observed that Nick takes things too personally, and we agreed that experiencing authentic success is important to his progress.—That is to say that when Nick has concerns, he is anxious or is unsure of himself, he has to translate this into coherent ideas or actions rather than feeling vulnerable and defensive. For example, when Nick was confronted with challenges on converting ounces to grams, Loric encouraged him to go on the Internet and try on his own versus accepting his stated resignation to the fact that he could not do it. He has to play less of a victim.

The 2:1 ratio with Kevin and Harry and me was very effective and allowed for more input from the two team members. Kevin was very involved both in the workgroup and the full group, where he was inquisitive regarding colours for design. He appeared to comprehend the importance of his role and responsibilities, and appeared more engaged and serious about the whole process.

Sometimes it appeared as though they were still a little too comfortable with their limitations; fear of mistakes seemed to serve to cap their potential. The bar had to be raised. Harry is a perfect example; he is very capable, and needed to be challenged. Sandra also needed to be pushed out of her comfort zone, and I decided to ask more from her in the following weeks (i.e., production supervision). I also decided to use different tactics with Natalie, putting her in more autonomous positions where she had to take more initiative on her own. Kevin trying to delegate his tasks, Nick not doing what was expected, Natalie's tendencies to follow—all these highlight the value of emphasizing responsibility and accountability. It was important not to underestimate the need for activities that force or demand performance. The extra time we took to go shopping, Loric helping with two groups, meeting with Harry and Kevin separately to work on marketing, and the extra hours scheduled for the production were all helpful in mitigating the impact of the tight time constraints.

Marketing meeting with Harry and Kevin. As previously mentioned, the lack of time to achieve all the needs and objectives of this project required extra modules/workshops and meetings, including my meeting with Harry and Kevin on Monday to work on some of the marketing details. They were both enthused and motivated, but very dependent on my leadership. While there was often consensus on and contributions regarding the “What,” much coaxing and prompting was needed to get them to move on the “How.”

I put them on separate tasks on the computer: Harry to finish up invitations to dragons', search for crowns and other images, and Kevin to do preliminary drawings/sketches for posters and flyers. I found that I had to repeat and recap frequently to ensure clear understanding of what was being done and why. Harry was very able on the computer; Kevin needed a lot of assistance and had difficulty working independently. Harry wisely suggested doing rough drafts, and he helped to guide Kevin.

Overall, it was a productive session, with lots of follow-ups for Wednesday, and of course there were the obvious advantages of working in 1:1 and 2:1 ratios. Harry did finish the invitations and sent them to me, and Kevin and Harry continued working together that afternoon and Tuesday to successfully produce some drafts for Wednesday morning.

May 4: Module 6—Production. I arrived at the school kitchen (our production facility) at 9:30, and Anne and Sandra had a head start prepping. They had not, however, set up to consider what and where and how the other team members would be included in the process. After minimal coaching, I decided that I would then leave them on their own and I would work separately with Kevin upstairs on marketing while Nick was integrated into the production process; when Harry and Natalie returned in the afternoon, they would also be integrated into the process.

It became apparent very early on that the volume of production work would be impossible to accomplish in one day, especially missing two team members for the morning. This meant being efficient was very important and that contingencies would be necessary. I very intentionally worked to ensure that I asked more questions than provided answers and played a much more peripheral role than heretofore had been the case.

Kevin and I worked 1:1 upstairs, where Kevin voiced his disapproval twice that Harry should not have chosen to go to the bowlathon, that he was needed and what we were doing was more important. I simply told him to bring it up with Harry and Natalie that afternoon if he felt strongly about it. Kevin also complained about some things that Harry had apparently insisted on when they had worked together alone on the marketing materials without guidance earlier in the week (after our Monday marketing meeting). Kevin was very focused, anxious/concerned/committed to the project succeeding and everything being ready on time.

I was pleased that the three people who had been assigned to bake cakes the night before did as promised (Sandra, Nick, and Anne). The kitchen provided a new environment for the team to collaborate in.

Nick was pleasantly surprised at his skills, and commented to me on how he was *so able* to cut the strawberries, whereas a year ago he shook so much and had cut himself so regularly that he had to abandon the kitchen program. He was impressed and very happy with himself. He was also quick to point out that he had used some milk in the making of his cake portion, and we had to warn people who are lactose intolerant. He also boasted how he had shaved his beard off for the kitchen work, since they do not have any hairnets for beards, and also shared with me that he had picked out his suit for our lunch in a few weeks. The team members' overall enthusiasm around things like our big celebratory team lunch at the end of May was a reminder of how seemingly simple and even mundane activities or obligations for some, can be viewed as exciting and amusing events for others.

May 4-Reflection

I discussed this with my wife that evening, since we often lose patience with our son, who more often than not makes a big deal out of things. As she and I agreed, many of these things

are truly a big deal for him. That Saturday, our son Domenic ventured out on his own with adapted transportation to visit one of his older brothers for the day. You would think he was off to Asia or on a safari. But for him going downtown alone was an adventure. For him it was very meaningful. For him it was a privilege. For him there was anxiety. In my view, this reinforces the importance of relevance, and whether it be as parents or educators, the ability and effort to empathize are necessary to ensure appropriate tactics and goals for the individuals one is dealing with.

Back to production: I was consulted because the scoops were either too big or too small for making the cake balls. I pushed the matter back to them, and they decided that with the dipping and decorations, the small scoop would be okay after all. I did suggest adding some milk to the mix, as it was not binding well. They did so, and then all three taste-tested to make sure it was okay and it met with their approval.

They made decisions about if and when to take morning pause and lunch break and for how long, who does what and where, etc. It was interesting how any break from routine (change in schedule, lunch time, etc.) seemed to demand lots of consideration by each individual. This reinforces the value of stepping out of one's comfort zone. Deinstitutionalizing means more than just physically removing challenged individuals from within the institution, but removing the institution from within them. It seems to me that the capacity to adapt and adjust within the community dominated by an 80% able population is crucial to their successful integration within that dominant population.

I did provide some prompting and challenged them to look for process improvements. For example, Kevin and Harry were somewhat on their own at a workstation as they scooped and

trayed the balls of cake in a very inefficient manner. Until I suggested that they revisit their process, they took no initiative to streamline by simply putting their feeder with the cake in between them and each having their own placement tray beside them. There were many opportunities for them to practice problem-solving skills. I wanted the team to understand and experience the difference between acceptance versus resignation, to be empowered to affect a situation versus being resigned to it, to be masters of their destiny. It was important to expose the participants to the many small and larger challenges, rather than jump in, due for example to the pressure of time, to solve them for them.

Budget considerations and responsibility seemed to be something they grasped quite handily. They were eager to apply some semblance of fiscal logic to their decisions and insisted on this serving as a unanimous collective lens to their analysis and perspective when contemplating next steps. As the chocolate chilled and made dipping cookie dough very difficult, in many cases breaking the “pops,” and when the strawberry shortcake did not chill adequately, in part due to the time factor, they demonstrated good critical thinking. They considered timelines and deadlines, quality, and appeal, and decisions were made on the spot during the debrief session. Everyone was involved and engaged rather than just a few of the team.

Debrief. We met at the end of the day in the teachers’ lunchroom, just off the kitchen. We had an excellent and focused debrief following a great team effort to do a good clean-up after the day’s production. There were interesting discussions around the consequences of missing team members in the morning, extra needs for production, and budget awareness. Collectively we recapped what had been accomplished, and there was a sense of pride, and then a decision was taken by everyone to cancel other outings and plans so as to come in early

Monday morning to continue with an extra shift (day) of production. I was very impressed at the contrast between 7 weeks ago and all of a sudden finding myself faced with a much more engaged, motivated, outspoken, able, and committed team of young adults.

May 4- Reflection

Maybe MYLYB, like so many educational programs, and activities, was simply serving as a sort of catalyst to change, a chance for individuals to revisit themselves, rediscover, and rebuild. And as people become more self-aware, confidence is rebuilt, restored, revived, and reinforced, and, empowerment is a natural consequence. This began as inductive research focused on the potential effectiveness of an entrepreneurship program, which was turning out to be successful in the same ways theatre or art, or music or outdoor education programs are. No doubt the theme of entrepreneurship is current and appealing, but it seems that the experiential nature of the design and focus on each individual's needs was what generated the positive results.

In my view, one of the highlights is how the participants cherished being valued. Feeling valued is empowering in itself. I expressed to Harry that while he was missed on the morning of production, his presence and help in the afternoon was greatly appreciated, and I congratulated him on the success of his invitations to the dragons'. Samuel observed the team in action, and at different times and separately, he approached both Kevin and Nick, remarking on their improved performance. They had both been forced to abandon the program in past years due to their challenges and limited abilities at the time. Samuel invited both of them to consider returning part-time to the program. Kevin and Nick glowed, and so did I!

Working together in a new and challenging environment gave me the chance to introduce a little more humour and spontaneity, as our relationships had matured, and it did not detract

from the seriousness of what they were trying to achieve. I was touched by witnessing their pleasure, laughter, and growth, knowing that maybe I had a little something to do with it. In my view, this was simply an example of the reciprocal nature of this type of work, giving and doing outside of oneself, something that I have been preaching for decades. The irony is that feeling valued myself empowered and encouraged and further motivated me to pursue my studies and continue work in adult education. I realized how much I was benefitting from the experience and how I was just as much an equal learner in the team.

May 9 and May 11: Module 7—Production continues and dragons' den

preparation. Monday was a reality check with respect to the integrity of the product and more materials and ingredient needs. I was glad I showed up! (In the meeting the week prior, I told them that I would likely not be there on that Monday.) Sandra, Natalie, Harry, and Anne were present and struggling with the shortcake. I had no choice but to be involved in addressing quality issues and making sure that some process improvements were made, but did my best to facilitate their arriving at these conclusions on their own. I didn't want them to be too discouraged by some of the product presentation and quality issues. They were also missing materials and ingredients.

On Wednesday morning, early morning production continued (third shift), with everyone present except Kevin (who had a very unfortunate meltdown at home, which I followed up with educators and social worker for more info).

Following production, we reconvened in our regular classroom. I expressed my pride in what they had accomplished so far, and we discussed some of the challenges resulting from decisions that had been made; that is, having two flavours was complicated, insufficient time

always a problem, perishability and transport issues, etc. We also talked about how working together in production the last few days had been fun, and how today we had to get real serious. I reminded them that in the first workshop I had advised them that I would not be speaking to them like kids or students but as young business professionals, and that we had a lot to do if we were going to achieve our goals. Their physical postures straightened up and attention levels jumped a notch and exuded what I perceived to be a sense of pride for what had been accomplished, and a confidence at the prospect of tackling all of the remaining tasks and responsibilities.

We reviewed what was done and all that was outstanding, and brainstormed on sales and marketing next steps (i.e., dragons' den content, accountabilities, etc.). After sharing ideas and concerns, there was a consensus reached that the retail price had to be lowered. Anne and Sandra would follow up with kitchen program logistics and Nick with the café for sales execution. They unanimously confirmed their desire to be filmed during dragons' den with assurances from me that the footage would remain confidential. The team generated several good ideas and suggestions; for example, writing down the order of presentations for dragons' den (Sandra), writing down their respective content for presentation (Anne), good discussions around how to track inventory and sales, deposits, etc. (Nick et al.)

Kevin's absence was disappointing, as he had been making great progress. (Apparently a \$1,000 long-distance cell bill was the root of his current problem; his mom cut him off, and some serious drama resulted.) There was collective concern from the group, and an agreement that if he could make it back for next week, we would find a way to integrate him into the presentations.

On a very positive note, Nick informed us with pride that he had had a big change of heart and had decided to return to the Select program next year attending the kitchen program part-time. They all wanted to know if an MYLYB program would be available again next year.

Dragons' den preparation. Nick was very worried about the presentation and had to be prompted/pushed to try to write down his notes for his part. Anne worked diligently on her own to write her product presentation segment; she was in the proverbial “zone.” Natalie was visibly relieved at the suggestion that she present together with Harry. Nick quickly reported that he too would be more comfortable standing with Sandra when he presents rather than being alone. Harry took on the marketing section and tried to write his presentation, and he and Natalie teamed up well to finish marketing/ad posters. I was curious to see the outcome the following week. Anne struggled with writing presentation content. I did brief 1:1 meets with everyone to review their content, and suggested they continue to work on it over the next week.

May 11- Reflection

Once again, the value of these activities and learning opportunities and the actual time available was disproportional; more practice time and exchanges/interaction would have greatly improved the learning experience. There were so many opportunities for teachable moments that time did not allow for.

I decided to make personal certificates of achievement for each team member, and the directrice would present them at our celebratory lunch. I also considered drafting a letter to the parents/ guardians of each of the team members briefly summarizing each learner’s recent achievements and recommended area for continued focus. I did do them, and had them reviewed and validated by educators at the centre.

May 18: Module 8—Dragons' den. I made it a point to arrive at the school early to review some of the logistics concerns and staffing issues and realities in the school that impacts the ability to execute King and Queen's sales. I met with school administration, accounting, and management regarding how sales of the product could be executed. By the time our 10:30 meeting began, I had also managed to meet everyone in the team 1:1 to review their presentations, except Kevin, who was unfortunately absent again and would miss the dragons' den. Together, the team and I produced a short-term action plan for sales, inventory tracking, and distribution, which held different team members responsible and accountable for follow-ups and execution.

We then had only 20 minutes to focus on preparation and rehearsal for dragons' den. Everyone had made solid individual efforts to prepare their content. Anne's presentation surpassed all my expectations; it was coherent and quite well delivered. During our 1:1, I told her how impressed I was, and she said that her dad and her sisters had said the same thing to her. She glowed, as did I.

Collectively, the team paid much attention to details, chronology, and content of presentation (such as when, who, how, where to stand, etc.). Everyone was engaged, with Sandra and Nick playing a predictable leadership and coordination role.

During practice, Nick froze; this had to do with the notes on the paper. He made a second attempt with no notes, and the results were worse. The third time I took him to the side and reviewed his five to six lines of notes with him and had him try to read through it. During the actual presentation, he delivered well and used the notes, and during the post-mortem, he announced that he was very proud and realizes that this is why he needs to go back to school and improve his literacy skills. He now saw literacy as a means to an enticing end, and he was

obviously motivated and empowered. Natalie was obviously extremely nervous, and I did not pay that too much attention; instead I reviewed her presentation and showed my confidence in her ability. I thought she might actually pass out in the presentation, but she pulled it off, and I could not help but experience a vicarious, prideful buzz from the others, for her achievement. Harry demonstrated unprecedented seriousness, and with some prompting, he also successfully delivered his segment. Sandra's lengthy overview of the production process was also well delivered.

During the Q&A part of the *den* after the actual presentations, comfort and confidence levels rose and the relief was almost palpable. My admittedly orchestrated questions that I discreetly provided to the dragons in advance helped to give the team a chance to speak freely. As advised by me, the dragons' exchange with the team was in a sophisticated, mature fashion. The team responded in kind. The entire event took only 35 minutes. Warm congratulations were provided by the dragons, and immediately following their departure, there was a spontaneous group hug and the warmest team exchange and pats on the back.

May 18-Reflection

During my 30-year career I have been responsible for literally dozens of management teams, and I have done my best to be mindful of the importance of promoting and perpetuating respect, integrity, and the value of teamwork. This team of young, inexperienced learners committed to a project and attacked it with perseverance and purpose, all the while perpetuating a culture of support and shared accountability. I wished I could bottle this positive energy and genuine sincerity and market it to the masses. Now there's a business idea!

CHAPTER V

Findings and Analysis

Post-Program Interviews with Learners

May 25: Module 9—Post-program interviews and team celebration lunch. I arrived to a very distraught Anne. Staff informed me that she had experienced a couple of bad days with the substitute in the kitchen (Samuel was absent on an undetermined leave for health reasons). She had arrived that day in a dress for our lunch, but as a result was not permitted to work in the kitchen. She sat on a chair near the front door of the school, curled up in a ball, waiting for her dad to bring her appropriate garb. I quickly discovered when we chatted that she had also experienced much frustration selling the cake pops alone in the kitchen at lunchtime, because she didn't know how to make change, resulting in countless errors in the cash, and as a 26-year-old, she was afraid to ask for help!

I listened and quickly coaxed a smile from her, and later we spent 30-plus minutes doing our post-program interview, wherein she opened up to me and delivered a teary-eyed explanation of her recent frustrations and about how in the past she had heard a lot of negativity (such as, “You won’t,” and “You can’t,” and “You won’t be able to . . .”). She reported that the course had helped to emphasize that this was not valid, and she was feeling more confident in herself as a result.

The lunch was celebratory, filled with laughter and smiles. While not planned intentionally, it worked very well that the team lunch immediately followed my post-project interviews and discussions. The collective mindset was one of camaraderie, a sense of achievement, victory, teamwork, and they all continued to be quite reflective and insightful.

Some of the adjectives that come to mind to describe these two hours: engaged, celebratory, insightful, and pride of one and all. The lunch basically served as a continuation in a collective scenario of reflection that had begun in the interviews beforehand.

Well received were the laminated certificates of achievement that I presented to them with the help of the directrice of the school, who I had secretly invited to join us for dessert (I thought her presence for the whole dinner would influence the mood) to help present and congratulate them. Pictures were taken, hands were shaken, and smiles were abundant.

The interviews. I opened each session with remarks around how informal and comfortable the interview was to be—more of a conversation—and how their input would be greatly appreciated and important as we try to build and improve programs like MYLYB for the future. The interview with Anne was one of six over the three hours of interesting and enlightening exchanges with most of the participants. There was a sharp contrast with the original screening interviews as all the participants were more relaxed, resulting in some very candid exchanges and interesting insights.

I managed to record the sessions as well as make notes. With the exception of Harry and Natalie, who required the most coaxing and prompting, all of the sessions could have been extended. The meetings oscillated between an interview and an almost counselling session type of exchange. The candidates appeared to enjoy the opportunity to be reflective, introspective, and share with someone who was not *too* familiar and was hopefully perceived as an objective, attentive, concerned/interested and reassuring and nonjudgmental listener.

While paraphrasing and prompting was more necessary than I had anticipated, the input was still very interesting. Some common themes emerged, and comments supported some of what had been observed during the delivery of the program.

May 25 -Reflections on the researcher's impact on the process.

Reviewing my notes and particularly the recordings confirmed my suspicions that the lack of time and the overt thesis interview research objectives pushed me to prompt and probe to expedite the interviews. A true counselling scenario would have demanded and allowed for more pauses and minimal encouragers to nurture and develop a lengthier and deeper and sustainable insight process. This resulted in a degree of dissonance as I experienced some conflicting training influences (i.e., studies and counselling experience in psychology, business training, and now education research), and I was aware of it in real time and did my best to stay on task. I did not want to discount the relevance or value of the potential insights, and had there been more time, some of the interviews would likely have been extended. It is interesting how one's position as a researcher and the actual research objectives can influence the process.

The recorded sessions and examinations of the notes were also a good exercise for me to evaluate my interview skills, which definitely had room for improvement. Some of my key observations and personal insights were speaking slower, committing to the pauses, not letting the questionnaire/guidelines dictate the direction too much, and staying open to taking an unplanned route to what might ultimately arrive at the same destination.

Despite the apparent room for improvement in my interviewing skills, my approach did evolve with each session, generating insight and interesting perspective. It was very fortunate that most of the students were, each in their own way, stimulated by the exchanges, and this reflective mindset made for valuable discussions. In my view, the interview and the inherent reflection and opportunity to express oneself is also part of the students' learning process. So, I thought it was important to temper the influence of my research needs and structured expectations of the thesis to allow them to grow and benefit from the process. It became

increasingly evident that I should just accept and manage any change in the direction of the exchanges and remain hopeful that it would still generate the relevant insight that I so hungrily sought.

While I did summarize some of the common themes and comments in the general analysis, I felt it would be relevant to include some of the highlights of the individual interviews:

Nick. Nick used the word *before* several times, as if there was a reality before the MYLYB program and now *since* MYLYB, which suggests this period of time and his participation had some significance for him. He discussed how his past experience with making mistakes had been very negative and how he found it challenging working with Sandra, who also took a leadership role.

Nick: “*Before* I was, ‘If you screw up once, you’re out of the team’. *Before* I never could’ve had or worked with employees ...”

Jed: “So you weren’t very patient with people, with their mistakes?”

Nick: “Yes. *Now* I have much more patience.”

I shared some examples of how smart people regularly change their mind based on new information, and how being open-minded has many benefits.

Jed: “What are you going to do next time you find yourself working with someone who is also a leader?”

Nick: “*Before* I wouldn’t explain the reasoning behind my opinion or decision.”

Jed: “Why do you think you’ve changed? What has changed in Nick?”

Nick: “People used to tell me just to give up on reading and writing, and I kinda listened to them, and gave up.”

Jed: "Once you give up, it's hard to go back?"

Nick: "Now, I just don't really care what people say."

Jed: "That's good."

This was followed by some more serious explanation from Nick about the schools his parents made him attend. He described the people he encountered, with many of them being literate but not very socially adept, and he was "treated like a retarded kid" and he witnessed a lot of bullying.

He was very interested in doing a program like MYLYB again and thinks that he could learn enough to be able to teach others. He definitely had experienced some changes in his demeanour, attitude, and confidence levels. In question nine regarding what he has changed his mind about, Nick replied assertively that, "I will stop telling myself I can't. I used to think I couldn't do things, and I know I need to be able to read as long as I put my mind to it. If you do the work, you get results!"

Throughout the different modules, as was evidenced throughout the notes, Nick had to deal with his literacy challenges and sharing the leadership role and the stress of presenting to the dragons. Sometimes Loric or I pushed him; on other occasions, he was quite self-motivated. In my view, he was amply rewarded for his efforts with achievements in the kitchen and an invitation to return and try the program again next year. His realizing that he *can* learn to read and write and needs to recommit himself to that goal and his improved overall confidence levels were significant insights for him.

I finished up very positively, commenting on his good work ethic, his being punctual, and emphasized all the great opportunities in front of him.

Jed: "Anything else you want to leave me with?"

Nick: "This was just 100% a very good thing that I joined, and I don't regret joining it. I made it all the way to the end. I worked with a group of people that I get along with. Sometimes me and Harry don't get along in other classes, but in this program I worked well with everyone ..." And recording was cut off!

Harry. This interview session was shorter than the others, and required a lot of prompting and aided awareness. He reported that he was tired that day. He did recall and declare his appreciation for the KISS (i.e., keep it simple, silly) concept, the desert island activity, and how he enjoyed his time with me and found the production challenging.

When I asked why he would want to participate in this program again, he replied, "It's fun and it helps to learn about things". He also said that what he had learned could help him find a job, but could not elaborate on why.

Anne. During my introduction, I expressed to her how I had seen important changes since we first met, and there was some laughter and some nervousness as I tried to set the mood in lieu of what occurred with her earlier that day. She was sometimes difficult to understand, requiring a lot of paraphrasing and validation. I may have overdone it, with the intention of prompting and encouraging and facilitating the exchange. She mentioned that we needed more time for the program, and I asked why. As I listened to the recordings, I recognized how my interview skills were evolving with each session, which infers that they were not optimal in the beginning. Without cramping their respective styles, I had to make sure that there was a balance between my input and inquiry and my ability to address and dig into some of the common themes as I tried to synthesize the incoming data and information.

Anne talked about the important thing being how she learned not to lose faith.

Anne: "If you don't stick with it, then what's the use of doing it?"

I agreed, and complimented her commitment and perseverance.

During question six we talked about how she hates being rushed, and I commented on how well she had dealt with the stress. She replied that, “elsewhere she doesn’t do so well.” I commented to her on how well she had dealt with the dragons’ den stress, and she replied that she had used yoga and other tools to prepare. I also asked her about the anxiety she had experienced around counting and making change when she was selling [numeracy challenges], and that she did not ask for help.

Anne: “I was like so stressed out, I didn’t know what I was doing.”

Jed: “Ask questions in the future.”

Anne: “I panicked. I didn’t want to bother people.”

I pushed the point about asking for help, that she deserved the assistance and people do not mind helping out.

Jed: “... [You] should never be afraid to say, ‘Hey, I think I might be messing this up; I need some help!’”

Anne went on to express other concerns, such as organizing inventory, and I reminded her about the usefulness of a list, a system to track, and that there are tools to help with challenges like this and that they can make things easier. We continued to talk about her ability to deal better with stress, and she introduced me to her history of being discouraged by those from whom she had sought support in the past

Jed: “But stress is part of life and shouldn’t stop someone smart like yourself from doing what they really want to.”

Anne: "I know, it's just ... when I was younger, some people were telling me that I wouldn't be this ... that I couldn't be that. It just affected me, like emotionally, physically, psychologically, so at a point, I was like, I just gave up."

Jed: "Why? Because people would tell you that you can't?"

Anne: "Yeah, they would tell me I can't do this, or I will never have a boyfriend, or I will never have a good job. So it's like, I may as well be lonely."

Jed: "So if you listen to them, you will be lonely, but you know in your heart and in your head that that's not true?"

Anne: "Yeah, exactly!"

Jed: "There will always be lots of people in the world that are going to tell you what they think, but it's what you think that's important, correct?"

I proceeded to summarize some of her great achievements over the past 9 weeks, and I said, "Next time someone is telling you that you can't do something, just think of all the great things you did for the past 9 weeks."

Anne: "Exactly. At least I am doing something worthwhile, something that I can pass on, instead of just staying in the house and eating and sleeping."

I mentioned how my buddy always says that, "if you don't leave the house, nothing ever happens." She replied enthusiastically, "Exactly!" and then proceeded to give an emotional account about how difficult high school had been, and how she needed to change. I supported her with my own declaration about how in my own life, things happened 40 years ago when I was in high school, and how I also remembered some of them today, good and bad. I did my best to stay supportive and keep positive, and she recounted how she had seen herself changing for the better.

Anne went on to explain how she would eventually like to teach a program like this to help other students to believe in themselves. She said that, “they can achieve something on their own instead of waiting for their parents. You could do it if you want to. If you are committed to it, you can do it, anything. You have to say, I can do it! You can definitely succeed. I see a lot of people that have so much potential that have the same thing, but it’s just that they don’t believe”

Jed: “Well, I give you a lot of credit. You said you wanted to do this program, you stuck with it, and you did very well. I’m extremely proud.”

Natalie. As was the case with Harry, much prompting was needed, and I did my best to provide some aided awareness. She was still very agreeable with everything that I suggested, and I tried hard to make it a very casual, unintimidating conversation, and did my best to try to solicit some input/insight.

Jed: “Let’s try this another way. So were there things that before this course you weren’t confident in that made you nervous?”

Nat: “Oh, making a mistake?”

Jed: “You mentioned that 8 weeks ago, so do you feel a little more confident about that now?”

Nat: “Yeah!”

I provided some words of encouragement vis-à-vis her recent performance in the program and asked, “So, what else do you feel more confident about now?”

Nat: Silence.

Jed: “So, for example, what kind of mistakes worried you?”

Nat: “Some of the production problems made me nervous.”

We discussed briefly and concluded that she had performed well under tough circumstances. I enquired how she felt about dragons' den, since she had admittedly been very nervous. Did she feel better about it now? She replied, "A little bit; it helped." I reiterated how well she had done, and how it wasn't a life-threatening situation and how much fun it can really be. This was received with laughter from Natalie, and an admission that she did feel a little bit better about presenting now. We exchanged about feeling more comfortable asking questions and how the stress of asking is less compared to flying blind, making mistakes, and feeling anxious about it. She seemed to understand the link, but there was minimal verbal reply.

We also discussed about how being wrong is so often condemned, starting at a very young age, and how it's okay to make mistakes. She agreed and laughed with what could almost be interpreted as some relief. To reframe the question about why she would like to take this program again, I tried role-play techniques, playing her parents/mom asking her why she wanted to take the program again.

Nat: "Cause,... ahhh, it's fun learning, using my hands..."

Despite prompting, and mining for more insight and allowing for ample pauses, I finally let it go. It was very tough to get answers. In the midst of giving her some homework, as I had done with the others, (where I encouraged them to send me by email anything additional they might think of so they might feel less on the spot), she exclaimed: "Show other people that this is something they could do, like, if, when they saw the video that I did, they thought maybe they could do it too ... It might help them in certain areas. I could try to help them!!" I explained that she's the type of person who comes up with some great ideas but not always immediately; that it would be good for her to write them down, since they are very valuable. She seemed to

agree. I had no luck soliciting responses on what she might like to change or improve in her life. There were long pauses.

I tried, “[How] did you feel after dragons’ den? (pause) About getting up there and speaking in front of strangers that way?”

Nat: “It felt good,” she said with a smile.

Jed: “Did it feel like climbing to the top of the mountain?”

Nat: “Yeah” (laughter).

Jed: “Well, I am very proud of you. Did you tell your parents about it?”

Nat: “Yeah,” she replied with pride and a smile.

Kevin. I opened with explaining how glad I was that he was back and that his team thought about him while he was away. I reminded him of all the great contributions he had made and that he had been there for seven very important weeks, and to take his time and think about his answers. When posed questions about what he enjoyed the least, he was quick to explain how very disappointed he was to have missed two sessions; he had a lot of regret. I pointed out that sometimes things are out of our control, that one week he was sick and that it wasn’t necessarily his fault.

For one minute or more I tried to get an answer on why he wants to do the course again and why it was such a “good experience”. There were long, long pauses, after which he finally said this experience could help him to get a job and learn how to come up with good ideas. I asked him if there is anything he might change. He remained focused on finding a job and how he is less nervous and more motivated now, but doesn’t seem to know what he has to do to achieve that. I suggested he has to ask more questions, validate, and communicate more. He exclaimed with some delight, “Like I just did before. Like I asked you to repeat your question

again, and I took my time, right?” I replied enthusiastically with a yes and “That’s a great example!”

I complimented him on his personality, how his smile lights up a room and how he has to work on verbalizing more. I asked if there was anything else that he wanted to talk about.

Kevin: “I feel terrible. I honestly feel bad leaving you guys when I was supposed to come or last week I was part of the team. I also told Natalie that I felt bad leaving you guys, because we were a team and I know... ummm...pause...”

I explained that he is still part of the team, and compared this to the new church he was so happy to be a member of. I said, “If you miss a Sunday, it doesn’t make you any less part of the congregation!” He seemed to understand, although he did seek me out later that day to speak in private and once again emphasize his concern and apologies for having been absent.

Sandra. I started with the same introduction as the others and proceeded with questions:

Jed: “What did you learn?”

Sandra: “I like being a leader more.”

Jed: “In what way?”

Sandra: “I had to get people together, to coordinate.”

Jed: “Did you enjoy that role?”

Sandra: “Yes” (laughing).

I explained how in her current and future jobs she’d probably find herself in many leadership roles, and then I asked, “What did you find most challenging with that role?”

Sandra: “It’s like, people are not doing things the way you expected, and you have to tell them. Like not boss, but you have to tell them, and sometimes they give you not the reaction that you think.”

Jed: "And sometimes they react ...?"

Sandra: "Yeah, like not very appropriately I guess."

Jed: "They probably think it is appropriate."

We proceeded to discuss the concept of empathy and relativity, and she talked about her current job at daycare and the leadership responsibilities she dealt with.

Jed: "Are there areas where you feel more confident now than you did a few months ago?"

Sandra: "Maybe more confidence."

Jed: "So are you feeling more confident?"

Sandra: "Yes" (with laughter).

Jed: "In what way?"

Sandra: "Maybe just like speaking my mind. It was easier to speak my mind because I didn't know everybody."

Jed: "Is there anything that you discovered over the past weeks, areas that you said, 'Hey, I want to work on that'?"

Sandra: "Maybe just speaking to people."

Jed: "So you want to get better at it?"

Sandra: "Yeah, exactly. I want to mumble less, like my words don't come out properly."

Jed: "Quite frankly, I found you very good."

Sandra: "Thank you," she replied shyly.

Jed: "In my experience, even very senior people in big companies, including myself, take public speaking classes. Communication is so important."

Sandra: "Oh, really," with surprise.

With regards to the questionnaire from Module 2, all those who answered had addressed at least two of their “five toughest/challenging aspects of starting a job”. For example, all had stated some worry about money and numeracy, and how to manage and be managed and deal with people.

The summary below captures some of the most common comments, concerns, and observations. I found that they became more meaningful for the students whenever during the interviews we made them actionable/transferable, when they were related to future opportunities and plans that each individual had for himself or herself.

When asked what each participant enjoyed the most about the project, they most frequently cited: making a company, working as a team, time with Jed. When asked what each participant enjoyed the least, several participants pointed to what they felt were personal failures. One said he felt badly about being absent, another reported being scared to ask for help, and another cited the sense of rush being bothersome. The participants were also asked what they learned. Top of the list was how to start a business and working as a team.

When asked about any areas where they felt more confident, they emphasized that they were less scared to ask for help, better understood how to make a plan and how to shop, were less fearful of speaking to strangers, better able to get along with others, felt more comfortable speaking their minds and were better able to deal with stress. Several students mentioned that they were less worried about making mistakes, more confident in presenting to people and that they thought that now they could foresee themselves doing similar activities in the workplace. The main areas where they indicated a lack of confidence was improving on presenting skills and ability to deal with stress and money.

With respect to any things they learned that would help them in their futures, they cited: Improved ability to communicate, an appreciation for KISS (simplifying), tools for reaching decisions, learned control and they all thought this would help them to find jobs.

When asked if they would you want to participate in a program like this again, they all replied with an enthusiastic yes and comments about how it was fun, taught them some basics in business and marketing and selling, how they enjoyed the hands on/actually doing aspect of the program and a couple for students said they would like to learn more so that they can then teach others.

The principle suggestions for improvement revolved round more time, more on building resumes, more activities and learning more business skills.

When asked if having participated in this course had changed their mind about anything, they cited: More motivated to start their own business, needed to improve on their efforts and ability to communicate, some teary eyed declarations that their potential was less limited than they and other people had previously believed, that they would like to eventually teach the program, help others, pay it forward, help others see the value of being committed and realizing their own potential.

Post-Program Interviews with Select Staff

June 1, 2, 5. Unfortunately, Samuel was still on sick leave, but I did get to meet with Jean Yves, Gene, and Jenny and Jasmine who also teaches most of the students in the group. I shared with them how I had appreciated their input and support over the past months and that this was a great chance for me to hear what else they might have observed as related to the questionnaire (Appendix H) and anything else they might want to add.

The staff comments summarized below were generally in line with what I had observed on my own and with Loric and through the questionnaires and interviews I conducted. All the input is summarized below for each learner:

Nick: There was considerable enthusiasm around Nick's progress, and unbeknownst to him, the staff had voted to present him with an annual year-end trophy that recognizes a student's exceptional improvement and progress. He had also changed his mind about leaving the Select program and would now be returning next year in the kitchen program part-time as well as focusing on his literacy skills in preparation for full integration into the working world. Obviously, these were exceptional results, and I was very proud of whatever influences the recent activities and MYLYB program had contributed to this about-face. I was also concerned about how sustainable these changes in attitude would be. Some examples are: a positive attitude, being proactive, open-minded, self-confident, more motivated and on task, and increased efforts to read and write.

Throughout the program, Nick was enthusiastic and committed and an important member of the team. He's inclusive and cares about others, and his numeracy skills and strong interest in working to become autonomous and independent added value to the team. Nick knows what he knows and seeks validation. His efforts to read and write increased over the nine weeks, and I worked hard to discourage the "I can't" attitude rather than putting in an individual effort first and then asking, "Can you help me with this?" He is a proud and ambitious young man, and I believe the challenges of the program appealed to that.

He was very pleased about his newfound abilities in the kitchen that had in the past been difficult or impossible for him (e.g., cutting, slicing). It was encouraging to see him respond well to being out of his comfort zone (e.g., presentation to dragons' den, reading, computer) and

to see the sense of achievement when he did overcome any anxiety. Nick pushed himself through the dragons' den presentation, and at the end enthusiastically declared how proud he felt and that "This is why I have to learn to read!"

Natalie: There were no significant differences observed and her behaviour was status quo in group settings, but she was more vocal and a less passive individual in smaller groups. She has to become more self-aware, more confident and assertive, but progress was apparent. Overall, some good changes. She is more vocal, more confident and self-assured with lots of room for continued progress.

Natalie showed interest throughout the program. While her agreeable and accommodating nature made her a pleasant teammate, I was glad to see her become less reserved and more vocal each week. I was also impressed to see her take initiative and volunteer during those opportunities for her to take a stand and to provide a personal opinion or preference. In my view, stepping out of her comfort zone is important for Natalie to improve her comfort and confidence levels when it comes to seeking assistance. Natalie's determination to face her obvious anxiety about presenting to the dragons was really impressive and resulted in her obvious sense of relief, accomplishment, and pride.

Harry: Needs consistency at home and lacks motivation but some positive changes observed with him doing; less boasting and being less self-centred. He still tends to be laid back and takes easiest route.

Harry's sense of humour and enthusiasm were evident from day one. Once directed to a task, he applied himself, and his literacy and computer skills were very helpful. In my view, the challenge is to motivate Harry to harness more of his potential. He is witty, gentle, caring, and when he focuses, his writing and reading and computer skills are quite well developed.

I can report that Harry's interest and participation evolved throughout the course of the program, as did his level of engagement and participation. He was vocal during the brainstorm sessions and volunteered to work on the company posters and marketing flyers. I was impressed at Harry's seriousness during the dragons' den preparation and presentation. I get the feeling Harry has a good time wherever he goes. Maybe we can all learn something from that attitude.

Anne: She experienced some recent issues with the substitute teacher in the kitchen program and experienced anxiety around lack of numeracy skills, but was generally observed as happier and more outgoing in past weeks.

Every week Anne showed increasing leadership and commitment to the project and tasks at hand. She knew when to be serious, but also had an infectious, hearty laugh that made our team activities even more enjoyable, particularly during the trials and tribulations of our production efforts. Anne demonstrated a quiet leadership during the kitchen tasks; she took initiative and did her follow-ups in a very responsible, accountable manner. Clearly articulating and enunciating her ideas is important, as she is very adept in two languages and sometimes knows more or has more to say than she lets on.

Kevin: He is tough to read and I received less information. There continued to be self-control issues outside of the program although he was observed to be happier, more motivated in past weeks and he demonstrated an improved level of engagement.

In general, Kevin's interest and participation also evolved throughout the course of the program. His affection for eye-hand creative activities such as drawing and writing was evident, as he volunteered to work on the company posters and marketing flyers and write for the group during the brainstorm sessions.

While it is sometimes challenging to understand exactly what he's thinking and/or feeling, his warm smile and gentle demeanour and questions and suggestions added much value to the team experience. Over the nine weeks, his level of comfort increased, as did his level of engagement and participation. It is unfortunate that Kevin missed the dragons' den presentations, but the team made sure to include and credit him for his contributions. I hope some of what he learned about being responsible, accountable, and the value of planning and teamwork will contribute to his self-confidence and that he will carry this forward.

Sandra: (*staff interviewees did not have much contact with her*)

Sandra's curiosity was evident from the outset, and her commitment and participation grew throughout the program. She was kind and inclusive of the entire team, and very organized, detailed, and loyal to the project. Sandra brought a gentle but convincing leadership and enthusiastic and responsible approach to the challenges experienced during the program. This included some amusing production issues. She made some serious and successful efforts for the preparation and presentation of the dragons' den content.

General Analysis

In reviewing some of the thesis goals and objectives and the interests expressed by the participants during the program, I cannot say with any degree of certainty that versus 10 weeks ago, Kevin is any closer to securing the employment he so desires or that Sandra has a better chance of starting her own business. And I cannot say that Anne will now be quicker to ask for help, or that Natalie will be more assertive, or that Harry will be more self-motivated. I can't even say for sure how much of the great progress Nick made was because of this program and whether or not it will be sustainable.

What I can say is that based on my observations and the staff's input, these young learners did respond enthusiastically to most of the activities, interacted and engaged well, and all of them were coaxed out of their regular comfort zones.

In my view, the program did succeed in certain critical areas. The interactive interdependent nature of the program promoted and perpetuated learning to work in teams, tolerance, and the value of the collective. (For example, Nick regarding leadership challenges and concern for absent members of the team; Nat presenting with the group; Kevin regarding bowling and his own need for help and reaching out, and his loyalty to the group). The emphasis on accountability reinforced the importance of taking ownership and being responsible to oneself and to the group. (For example, cake preparation at home, marketing tasks, and miscellaneous follow-ups). They learned the reality of deadlines and that there are tools to help mitigate the stress of due dates. (For example, ask questions, make a plan, KISS).

Everyone dealt in their own way with the challenges of understanding and being understood, which served to illustrate the importance of clear communication to avoid making mistakes, confusion, and often-avoidable anxiety. (For example, sales and presentation of ideas, compromise and consensus-reaching, taking a position, etc.).

They also experienced firsthand some of the valuable lessons that can be learned when we step out of our respective comfort zones. (For example, sense of achievement and validation from the dragons' den exercise, Nick returning next year to a program that he had not succeeded in in the past, Sandra being even more motivated to start her own business, Anne feeling more self-confident). Empowered by these recent successes, I believe that most of these young people will be just a little less reticent next time they are faced with an opportunity, a challenge, a new responsibility, or a chance to step out of their comfort zones. They learned and experienced the

value of commitment and the satisfaction that one derives from seeing a task or project or idea through to fruition.

Using the observations and data available, I cross-referenced the original learning objectives of the program (the four of the five major categories of learning that the program would focus on: page 46 of the program design section), and there is evidence that at least briefly, during some point in the program, many of these areas were addressed,

With respect to acquisition of knowledge, they all, to varying degrees, improved on basics in calculating and general numeracy, and they learned some very basic concepts about marketing and advertising their product and company. Everyone was required to focus on some reading and comprehension efforts. The motivation and needs of the project succeeded in people being self-reliant and pushing themselves and becoming resourceful through texts, emails, and computers. They learned about structuring ideas though constructing a business plan and production plan and dragons' den plan, and grasped the idea of writing a mission statement:

King and Queen Cake Pops is a company made up of a team of young people who work and learn together and leverage each other's strengths to produce, market, and sell quality cake products. Any profits go to helping create more opportunities for young entrepreneurs at Select.

Cognitive skills were enhanced through decision making during production and throughout the program and the execution of their plan. They worked on their ability to observe and report back and recount with clarity and accuracy during the selling activities and Desert Island and brainstorming activities.

They strengthened their problem-solving skills and realized capabilities including dealing with the purchasing, production, and timing issues, just to name a few. Critical thinking was applied, and enhanced listening skills were needed when they had to recount what they had just been presented. Working in groups, following and demonstrating leadership was evidenced, particularly by Sandra and Nick and the other students also rose to certain occasions.

There were some changes in attitude, values, beliefs, and/or feelings that were expressed throughout the interviews, and as importantly, one could observe these changes during the modules. They demonstrated improved self-esteem, self-efficacy through self-awareness, recognition of potential, understanding the nature of compromise, consensus, commitment and ethical behaviour, deferring gratification, and cooperative learning.

When I cross-referenced what actually happened with some of the more overt workshop objectives (pages 47-48 from program design), there was definitely room for improvement in certain areas and some objectives that were not achieved. They achieved a very limited understanding of the fundamentals needed to be an entrepreneur; to own and operate an idea/passion in an enterprising manner and to actually run a business. It is difficult to ascertain how much the participants truly made any connections (some subconsciously) between business and entrepreneurship and the approach to their own lives.

It is also challenging to measure the degree to which the activities and environment were successful in demonstrating and generating awareness around the options available for the students and how much they may have discovered that their interests and the things they find appealing and enjoy might potentially provide opportunities for them; that passion equals power.

As noted earlier, there were varying degrees of success in the areas of access to and acquisition of tools and, while limited, participants did understand at least some of the mechanics of business. On a more positive note, a few students (i.e., Nick, Anne, Sandra) did make some conscious connections between business and entrepreneurship and the approach to their life plans. Some also grasped the concept of pursuing and acting on new ideas, making a plan, understanding deferred gratification, learning what tools are needed to succeed, the value of being resourceful, and the value of actually doing something and taking action.

Any change in a participants' self-worth is also hard to measure, but there were signs of some students becoming more aware of and acknowledging some of their personal aspirations and interests and potential and their understanding that "passion equals power" and that "nothing happens until someone actually does something". Through the exploration of the fundamentals of entrepreneurship and participation in meaningful activities, these learners did discover they were able to decipher new skills and acquire knowledge that is transferable and that they translated into competencies, and confidence and higher self-esteem and self-efficacy and ultimately more empowered individuals (i.e., making a plan, KISS, arriving at a consensus).

CHAPTER VI

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion

In summary, the delivery of the program achieved several of its objectives, generating equally positive results for the participants and the researcher. Many elements were in place to encourage the creation and function of a successful *community of practice*. The common interest in entrepreneurship provided a group of motivated learners. With the limited time available, the program's activities, events, and discussions encouraged and even demanded critical thinking, interdependence, independence, and venturing out of one's comfort zone.

Each of the participants (some more than others) demonstrated some positive changes in their attitudes and skill levels. This newfound confidence will no doubt fuel the road to empowerment. Some of the more remarkable changes observed, such as with Nick or Anne, are a testament to how effective incidental learning can be. Previously, both these individuals had been victims of their potential being capped and this program opened their eyes to *what could be* versus *what is* or *what someone might say it is*.

Reflection

On a personal and related note, my wife and I spent years showing our son how to tie his shoes but to no avail. All of a sudden, at 12 years old, he did it! Why, we don't know, but what I do know is nobody ever told him that he couldn't!

As both an educator and a parent, I am well aware that we all have to face and deal with the reality of certain limitations. Nobody is exempt. Where nature plays an important role, so does nurture. This includes providing access to the needed tools in a comfortable and appropriate learning environment, and being exposed to opportunities that can impact how one lives with their limitations and leverages their unique potential.

Programs like MYLYB are designed to promote understanding and respect for the value of that potential; the fact that everyone has something to share. Sir Ken Robinson (2010) in his TED Talk declares that human talent is very diverse and that, “like natural resources, human resources are often very deep, you have to go looking for them.” He goes on to explain how important it is to create conditions that are personalized to the people that one is actually teaching and how life is not linear, like education has been in the past--it’s organic “about passion and what excites our spirit and our energy.”

The students in MYLYB benefitted from exposure to new experiences, ideas, and hands-on opportunities. I think that timing also played a part and I was very fortunate to encounter several students who were ripe for change. Maybe some of the success was simply a result of the old adage, “*When the student is ready, the teacher will appear.*”

As a researcher, I was also busy learning and interpreting a plethora of insights. From an execution standpoint, it was clear that true malleability and flexibility is necessary to keep a program like this relevant and learner appropriate; that it is crucial to be able to temper facilitation of the group and the level and degree of intervention that is appropriate. There is real challenge to being a researcher, observer, facilitator, and program designer simultaneously.

I experienced firsthand the old adage that, “man makes plans and God laughs.” Numerous unexpected challenges arose, with just a few of the highlights being:

- The serious lack of time to be able to fully execute and benefit from the many activities that had been planned.
- Production issues that added cost and required much more time than had been anticipated.
- Freezer door was left slightly ajar, presumably by one of our team members, and the school lost valuable food. I felt like a bit of a hindrance to the school, which was already dealing with a plethora of challenges and issues with students and administration, and certainly didn't need more headaches.
- The constant battle between being a researcher, facilitator, and observer.
- The dissonance experienced when trying to conduct research interviews and **not** counselling or life coaching sessions.

I had the privilege of a front-row seat to view how ownership, accountability, responsibility, trial and error, and achievement can morph into empowerment, and hopefully a more resilient self-efficacy. I also witnessed firsthand additional proof that not only does everyone have something to share but that it's not what you have in life, it's what you give!

Recommendations

I am hopeful that this exploration, and the support I received from learned staff, the learners and accomplices, will provide some valuable insight on what *is* being done and what *can* be done to help young adults who are living with learning disabilities. Furthermore, what can be done to facilitate their acquisition of the skills, attitudes, and self-efficacy to achieve their unique potential and to function autonomously and productively as empowered members of their community?

I also believe that these learnings could have a potentially wider sphere of influence resulting in programs and curriculum that are easily moulded. Versions of this program could be adapted for a variety of groups. This could include young adults who might come from the inner city or less than affluent communities where access to financial support and post-secondary education is limited, and aspirations for the future might be somewhat capped by their environment and a perceived lack of access to resources. This program could also incorporate atypical youth who are transitioning in and out of detention centres, young adults in re-adaptation centres, or as part of existing school board-sponsored post-secondary programs.

From a purely design and delivery perspective, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of recognizing how much learning occurs en route to certain objectives—that it's all about what happens on the way!

From a pragmatic perspective, I think that in order to compete for funds and interest in programs like MYLYB, a lengthier study might demonstrate that participants in this type of program have better odds of attending post-secondary education/training and generally show a higher overall success rate, and therefore also cost the State less, as they will contribute more through their tax contributions, and as active members of the community.

It is important to emphasize that this program includes important life skills and social-integration elements and not just business-related knowledge, and that the use of varied teaching/learning techniques may have been even more effective than past approaches with other similar groups in similar programs.

Any appeals for support for this program, be they financial or otherwise, would likely vary in approach, relative to the audience being solicited, i.e., a business school versus Batshaw type institutions, trade schools or a C.L.S.C. Caffarella's (2002) importance and feasibility

criteria are influenced by where and why, and for whom a program would be considered. There are other factors, such as whether or not the participants have volunteered to attend, have paid for the course, their age group, socioeconomic status, and even gender.

Consideration of these factors helps to ensure use of appropriate and more effective techniques that consider those community and societal forces, especially since we have so much less influence over those forces compared to influence over the actual content, design, and even organizational context.

The narrow realm of this study confirms some of the obvious: that there are ambitious young adults presenting with learning disabilities who seek opportunity to acquire more skills, tools, and resources to achieve their potential. They are not necessarily receiving the support they need and deserve. The fact remains that despite gallant and admirable efforts by multiple organizations to leverage new technologies and facilitate integration through training, there are still gaps to be filled.

Ratios are challenging, resources are scarce, and this population's limitations appear to have less to do with them and more to do with the system and the able population. If anything, this thesis simply confirms well-informed suspicions that we can do better; we can make content relevant; we can create more winning conditions for learning and empowering; we can be more effective in providing opportunities for all our citizens to be the best they can be.

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Appendix A

List of Organizations Considered for the MYLYB Program

- **WOTB** (Work-Oriented Training Path): The Work-Oriented Training Path (WOTP) consists of two different programs of education: Pre-Work and Semi-Skilled. Both of these pathways give students the opportunity to obtain practical training in the workplace while pursuing General Education with a Secondary Cycle One curriculum adapted to their needs.
- **LEARN** (Leading English Education and Resource Network): A non-profit organization that primarily serves the public and private Anglophone and Aboriginal, Youth and Adult Education sectors of Québec.
- **Contact:** Under the Commission Scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeois, the mission of these Education Centers in LaSalle and Lachine is to do everything possible for their adult students to develop skills, behaviors, and attitudes that will enable them to succeed academically and integrate the labor market.
- **Endeavor.**
- **ForMetal.**
- **Galileo School under the English Montreal School Board.**
- **Life:** A new *bubble* program whose intention is to prepare challenged young adults for integration into the community and quite frankly is a place to go after high school.

Appendix A

- **West Island Re-adaptation Center (CROMM).**
- **YMCA: Succession and Diversion Programs**

Appendix B

Recruitment Handout

Are you Interested in Business and Becoming an Entrepreneur??

Jed Richman, entrepreneur, business consultant and Master's student in Concordia University's Education department invites you to participate in a pilot program on the subject of Entrepreneurship.

Limited attendance so anyone interested should please submit their request to jed@visionservices.ca as quickly as possible.

Please include your coordinates and a short note describing your interest and motivation in learning about being an entrepreneur.

Appendix C

Referral Questionnaire

Please fill out the following information form. Data on this form is for screening purposes only and will be destroyed once participants are selected for the study.

PARTICIPANT REFERRAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Date: _____

Name: _____

Date of birth (d/m/y): _____

Gender: Male: _____ Female: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Email address: _____

Student Status: Full-time _____ Part-time _____

First language English: No _____ Yes _____ Other _____

Age: _____

Two-hour commitment 8 weeks, evenings: No _____ Yes _____

Most recent school attended, to what grade? _____

Post-secondary Institution Faculty of Study, if applicable: _____

Interest in Entrepreneurship and learning about it and being involved in a project like *Make Your Life Your Business?* No _____ Yes _____

Appendix D

PARTICIPANT SCREENING INTERVIEW GUIDE

Date: _____

Name: _____

1. On a scale of 1-5 how interested are you in business and entrepreneurship?

2. What appeals to you about business and entrepreneurship?

3. What does not appeal to you about entrepreneurship?

4. What does entrepreneurship mean for you?

5. What type of business activity or idea(s) interest you?

6. Why?

7. What excites/interests you the most?

8. Why?

Appendix D

9. What do you enjoy most about learning and why?

10. What do you find most difficult about learning and why?

11. What skills/tools do you think would help you better navigate and succeed through life?
(Might provide examples: organization skills, math skills, people skills, less shy, more reserved, etc.)

12. Are there any areas of your life would you like to change i.e., social, academic, employment etc.?

13. Who/what do you admire and why?

14. Where do you see yourself in 2-5 years?

Appendix E

Consent to Participate in Research



INFORMATION AND CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Study Title: Make Your Life Your Business

Researcher: Jeremy Richman

Researcher's Contact Information: 514-942-1294 jed@visionservices.ca

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Ailie Cleghorn

Faculty Supervisor's Contact Information: 848-2424-2041

ailie@education.concordia.ca

Source of funding for the study: Jeremy Richman –Personal

You are being invited to participate in the research study mentioned above. This form provides information about what participating would mean. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or if you want more information, please ask the researcher.

Appendix E

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to determine how an experiential learning program that is designed around entrepreneurship can be tied to the acquisition of fundamental life skills and literacy levels and empower young adults.

B. PROCEDURES

If you participate, you will be asked to participate in the following activities:

Weekly workshops, (potential visits from guest speakers, visits of businesses) where you will learn about being an entrepreneur and develop with a team a business idea (s) and “go to market” plan.

You will be interviewed and asked to complete questionnaires before and after the workshops. At the end of the program and interviews there is the possibility of a reward, such as a ticket to a game or movie or restaurant. In total, participating in this study will take 8-10 weeks, 2 hours per week.

C. RISKS AND BENEFITS

You might or might not personally benefit from participating in this research. Potential benefits include: The opportunity to interact with a team of contemporaries while learning about and perhaps even building a mock business. Guest speakers or offsite activities like visiting a business could also be part of the program.

Some of the potential benefits:

- Acquisition of knowledge: Fundamentals in numeracy and reading

Appendix E

comprehension.

- Enhancement of cognitive skills: Ability to structure ideas, make a plan, ability to observe and report back/recount with clarity and accuracy.
- Strengthening of problem-solving skills: Improved capacity for critical thinking (i.e., case studies and other group work), enhanced listening skills, working in groups, following and demonstrating leadership.
- Changes in attitude, values, beliefs and or feelings: Improved self-esteem through self-awareness, recognition of potential, understanding the nature of compromise; basic ethical behavior and learning patience.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

The only people that will have access to the data are the principal investigator as well as the researcher's academic supervisor. All electronic data will be stored on either the secure servers of the Concordia University Department of Education or Vision Services Inc. to which only the researcher has access.

We will not allow anyone to access the information, except people directly involved in conducting the research, and except as described in this form. We will only use the information for the purposes of the research described in this form.

The information gathered will be identifiable. That means it will have your name directly on it. However, this information will remain confidential and only available and accessible for the researcher and his advisor and stored in a password protected computer.

Appendix E

We intend to publish the results of the research. However, it will not be possible to identify you in the published results.

We will keep the information indefinitely and it may be used in the course of my PhD thesis.

F. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

You do not have to participate in this research. It is purely your decision. If you do participate, you can stop at any time.

There are no negative consequences for not participating, or stopping in the middle. If a participant withdraws, all data that has been gathered up to that point will be retained.

There will be compensation, such as a ticket to a game or movie or restaurant for participants completing the program.

G. PARTICIPANT'S DECLARATION

I have read and understood this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and any questions have been answered. I agree to participate in this research under the conditions described.

NAME (please print)

SIGNATURE

DATE

Appendix E

If you have questions about the scientific or scholarly aspects of this research, please contact the researcher. Their contact information is on page 1. You may also contact their faculty supervisor.

If you have concerns about ethical issues in this research, please contact the Manager, Research Ethics, Concordia University, 514.848.2424 ext. 7481 or oor.ethics@concordia.ca.

Appendix F

Concerns and Expectations Questionnaire

Name: _____

Date: _____

In your opinion, please list the:

Five toughest/challenging aspects of starting and managing a business:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

Five easiest, most fun aspects of starting and managing a business:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

Appendix G

Post Program Interview Questionnaire

Post Program Questionnaire/Interview (*Students*)

- 1) What did you enjoy most? Why?
- 2) What did you least enjoy? Why?
- 3) What did you learn?
- 4) Are there areas where you feel more confident?
- 5) Are there areas where you feel less confident?
- 6) Do you feel you learned any things that will help you in your future? What and Why?
- 7) Would you want to participate in a program like this again?
- 8) Why? Why not?
- 9) What would you want more and less of if you could retake this program? What might you change?
- 10) Having taken this course have you changed your mind about anything? Is there anything that you will change as a result of participating in this program?

Appendix H

Post Program Interview Questionnaire

Post Program Questionnaire/Interview (*Teachers and Educators at Select*

What (if any) changes in behavior and/or attitude did you observe over the past 10 weeks?

Specifics:

- 1) Interaction with and respect for others
- 2) Literacy and numeracy abilities and efforts
- 3) Oral and presentation skills
- 4) General Comprehension
- 5) General enthusiasm
- 6) Leadership and teamwork
- 7) Self-confidence, self esteem
- 8) Other (e.g., attitude)

Appendix I

Sample Modules

Overview

- History
- What does it mean to be entrepreneurial?
- Develop an understanding of the fundamentals of starting and operating a business
- Investigate one's personal interest and potential and design a topline plan for a
- Business of their choice (consensus)
- Process (weekly, 90 minutes-2 hrs), confidentiality, time management, meaning and
- Value of consensus, teamwork, 50/50, malleable , workshop is theirs!

MAKE YOUR LIFE YOUR BUSINESS!

Appendix I

MODULE 1

Objectives of this module are to:

- 1) Familiarize the group with themselves and the project
- 2) Explore the concept of entrepreneurship
- 3) Share ideas and introduce some concepts
- 4) Consider and record ideas for group business initiative

Introduction: (Perhaps play a Montage of the Apprentice, Dragons Den, Shark Tank themes TBD) Lecture and discussion. This first module focuses on engaging the participants from the outset; getting their attention and interest, demonstrating the relevance of the material to them and their lives, understand their personal expectations.

Share and discuss objectives and plan for the entire course:

- 1) What does it mean to be entrepreneurial? (PPTs)
- 2) Discuss and develop an understanding of the fundamentals of starting and operating a business (Flip chart ideas and park).
- 3) Investigate one's personal interest and potential and design a topline plan for a business of their choice PPT. (Plant some seeds, Flip chart some ideas Park them and then assign to come back with their own preferences.)
- 4) Briefly review outline of all modules. (PPT overview.)
- 5) Suggested readings, resources and follow ups TBC.

Appendix I

Execution: (Info sharing and discussion)

- 1) Ice breaker activity TBD. (Two things people do and don't know about them.)
- 2) Process, bathrooms, meet times, my expectations, review overview of course
- 3) Intro leader, background, anecdote about business or life. (Volunteer and work, highlights of work and school).
- 4) Roundtable: Participants verbalize their identity and their expectations and objectives; flip chart and park and then later distill via anonymous numbering by top four. (Circle and number.)
- 5) Then highlight the top collective choices. Or I list my objectives, they choose and add anything and then vote on importance.
- 6) Review the overt objectives of the course in terms and detail relevant to audience and what the entire program looks like, tools or reading or other resources that might be required. (PPTS with modules overview; 50/50 info sharing/group work and building a mock business.)
- 7) Any miscellaneous concerns or requests before proceeding.
- 8) Definitions of entrepreneurship.
- 9) The "What" and "Why" of starting a business.

Homework: Return with two or three ideas/suggestions for business initiative for group and explain why.

Appendix I

Info Sharing:

What is Entrepreneurial?

What does it mean? Examples of definitions.

Entrepreneur (noun): Someone who starts their own business, especially when this involves risks:

Entrepreneurial (adjective): “She'll make money - she's got that entrepreneurial spirit.”

(from: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/cald/> " Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary)
Merriam-Websters)

French: (Old French from Entreprendre) to undertake a project or undertaking that is especially difficult, complicated or risky.

Readiness to engage in daring or difficult action INITIATIVE. “[He/she] showed great enterprise in dealing with the crisis.”

- a) A unit of economic organization or activity especially a business organization.
- b) A systematic purposeful activity. “Agriculture is the main economic enterprise among the people.”

What does entrepreneurial mean to you? (Info sharing and discussion)

What does entrepreneurial mean for someone, for you? Are there any basic dynamics or characteristics common to any successful entrepreneurial or business endeavor?

(Supply-demand, need for a plan, need money, revenues management.)

Appendix I

Does being entrepreneurial mean revenues have to be involved? Can there be other rewards? Examples of this; not for profit organizations, meals on wheels, fund raising, providing services for the community, etc.

What potentially constitutes acting in an entrepreneurial fashion i.e., leveraging a passion, the need to be creative, skill or set of skills, being the boss, is it an attitude a skill etc.?

In teams of two or three, they discuss what they think are priorities to build and run a business then present and explain to group. Go around the room and ask for one idea from each group, Flip Chart and repeat and discuss and then prioritize using anonymous vote, discussion.

The “What” and “Why” (deciding to start a business):

(Info sharing and discussion)

Everything starts with an idea, somebody decides to actually do something (“because nothing ever happens until someone does something”). Reasons why a business could be started (e.g., basic premise of supply and demand, adding value, in provision of a service, product, filling a need, etc.)

In teams and/or individually formulate a succinct definition of what it is one wants to achieve (could be to simply to alter a current reality. some of the reasons why someone might want to start a business) want to create something or become active in a passion

Examples: One wants to continue doing same type of work under different circumstances i.e., be one’s own boss (e.g., Richard.)

Appendix I

One requires revenue, create self-employment examples: Crémierie, cutting the grass, cutting hair, teaching an acquired skill (dance, tutoring, music, sports, etc.).

Brainstorm; generate and distill ideas

Explore concept of Mission statements; define, give examples.

Homework: Return with two or three ideas/suggestions for business initiative for group and why each participant should come back with a very topline plan/idea of what they might like to do.

MODULE 2

Objectives of this second module are to:

- 1) Review and distill ideas and reach consensus on group business initiative.
- 2) Awareness around and development of listening skills.
- 3) Awareness and understanding of the tools, needs, fundamentals to start and operate a business.
- 4) Clarity in presenting ideas, sharing one's passion, promote understanding of the value of structuring one's ideas, clarity in developing these ideas and how a vision can come to life when it is organized and communicated outwardly.

Execution:

(Info sharing and discussion)

- 1) Ice breaker activity. (TBD)
- 2) Review objectives of session PPT.

Appendix I

- 3) Select groups of two they present/explain to each other their respective ideas for business and why. Then their partner, the presentee, presents their partner's program ideas to class.
- 4) Flip chart business ideas and anonymous grading by interest and feasibility and Park any other relevant topics that arise.
- 5) Discuss with flip chart and PPT the “**What**,” “**Why**,” and then the “**How**.”
- 6) The 3 Ps!!
- 7) The value of a plan.
- 8) Next steps and accountabilities of group. Plan for group project.

The What (Idea)

The Why (Review Module 1 flip chart re: filling a need, making money, need job, etc.)

The How (includes who, when, where)

Structure: Any project of any importance that is going to be successful almost always requires some structure, a plan which includes establishing targets, timelines, parameters (fiscal, ethical, etc.,) and measures.

Strategy: Define and discuss, explain, examples.

Method: Define and discuss, explain, examples.

Critical path: What is a critical path, why it's called that, its purpose (form of measure of progress, benchmark, signposts, accountability/responsibility for each task.

Appendix I

Measures/Metrics: What does success look like? Examples: money, number of students, hours of work ratio to revenues, profits etc.)

The importance of measuring, K.P.I.s (Key Performance Indicators) which allow for and influence adapting and adjusting plans.

9) **3 Ps** Discussion (Product, Positioning, Price)

10) Discussion and info around value of a plan. “Man makes plans and God laughs”(Old Jewish proverb)

Handouts and review elements of a making a bus plan. (Details listed below.)

Examples of content: “**Making a Business Plan.**”

11) Elaborate /plan for grp project, next steps, discuss accountabilities and responsibilities and what they mean

Homework TBD

MODULE 3

Sales 101 + Ethics in business; Case studies, critical thinking and values. (Info sharing and discussion)

The Objectives of this module are to develop:

- 1) Understanding of how sales is part of everyone’s life.
- 2) Clarity in presenting ideas, sharing one’s passion.

Appendix I

- 3) Awareness and understanding of the tools, needs, fundamentals and techniques for effective selling
- 4) Ethics in business. (Could be moved to Module 5 HR.)
- 5) Next steps for group project.

Execution:

- 1) Ice Breaker (ex. Death of a Salesman excerpt, video clip etc.)

Simulations for the purpose of observing and identifying sales in a variety of everyday scenarios. Everyone is always selling something: an idea, a product, a service, a need. (Examples: going to a movie or specific place for dinner, child rearing, employees, coworkers, employers, always trying to convince people of something, etc.)

- 2) S.A.M or S.M.A.R.T.: Specific Achievable Measurable objectives when selling.

Techniques; responding to objections. How to differentiate, never denigrate the competition, focus on ones strengths not the others' weaknesses.

- 3) Presentation skills: Eye contact, behavior, projection, enunciation. Visuals: visual aids to enhance not to steal from presenter, not too busy, PPT. Handouts/leave behinds, controlling pitch or presentation i.e. an exchange or inquest versus presentation.

- 4) Negotiating skills: Define and discuss compromise, the art of the “win-win.” Role play in groups of three with one being observer. Provide them with two lists with criteria for each

Appendix I

of the two parties as they negotiate a deal, they act out and observer reports back to class what was witnessed and learned. (Responding to objections, self-critique.)

5) Case studies: Examples of situations where ethics and values influence decisions.

6) Group project: Next steps.

Homework: Individuals select two products or services of interest to them for Module 4, think of why they like them and list or group project oriented tasks.

Appendix J

Certificates for Participants



Appendix K

Letter to Parents

May 25, 2016

To the parents or guardians of Nick,

My name is Jed Richman, the educator who is had the pleasure and privilege of working with your son Nikolai this past nine weeks in the “Make Your You’re your Business” entrepreneurship program.

As you may recall, the objective of this program is to leverage the theme of and tools acquired through entrepreneurship to facilitate a learner’s acquisition of fundamental skills and empower them to explore and achieve their unique potential.

Nick was enthusiastic and committed to our project and an important member of the team. He’s inclusive and cares about others and his numeracy skills and strong interest in working to become autonomous and independent added value to the team.

Nick knows what he knows and seeks validation. His efforts to read and write increased over the nine weeks and I worked hard to discourage the "I can't" attitude versus putting in an individual effort first and then asking "can you help me with this?" He is a proud and ambitious young man and I believe the challenges of the program appealed to that.

He was very pleased about his newfound abilities in the kitchen that had in the past been difficult or impossible for him (ex. cutting, slicing). It was encouraging to see him respond well to being out of his comfort zone (ex. presentation to Dragons' Den, reading, computer) and the sense of achievement, when he did overcome any anxiety. Nikolai pushed himself through the

Appendix K

Dragon's Den presentation and at the end enthusiastically declared how proud he felt and that "this is why I have to learn to read!!"

After the Dragon's Den exercise, it was quite frankly heartwarming to witness the team's sheer joy in what they had accomplished together as was further evidenced by a spontaneous group hug.

Based on his behaviour and post program interview, he appears to have enjoyed the experience. Stepping outside of one's comfort zone and experiencing new challenges and responsibilities is so important for growth and evolution. I hope some of what he learned about being responsible, accountable and the value of planning and teamwork will contribute to his self-confidence and that he will carry this forward.

I am now finished the program and will be returning to Concordia University to complete my Masters work. I want to thank you for encouraging and supporting Nikolai's involvement in this program.

If you have any questions or comments do not hesitate to reach me at
jed@visionservices.ca

Sincerest thanks and have a good summer,

Jed Richman

Appendix K

Example of a Reply

Hi Jed,

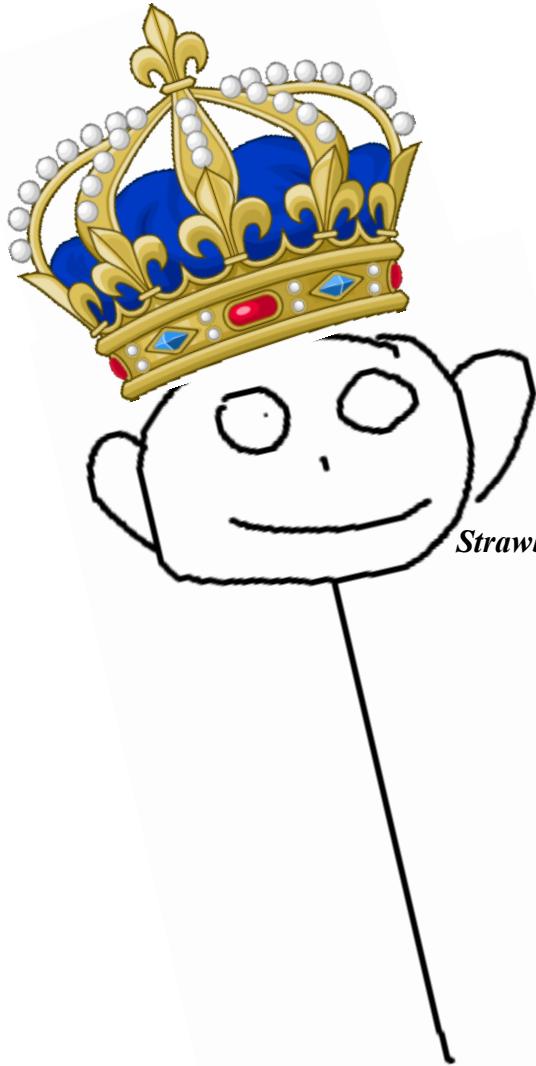
My wife and I would like to thank you for your time and kind words. Harry is in our lives for a reason! We can only hope that he can meet more people like you!! We totally understand that responsibility = maturity and that is the path to his independence.

Again thank you for inspiring our son!! Have a great summer and take good care!!

Harry's parents

Appendix L

Flyer



Kings and Queens Cake Pops

Unique, Cool Snacks!!

TASTY!

JUST EAT IT!!!!

DELICIOUS!

2 Flavours:

Strawberry Shortcake and Cookie Dough Delight

ONLY \$2.00 each



To Purchase Please Contact:

Appendix M

Letter of Recommendation



**Centre d'Éducation des adultes de Lasalle
Programme Contact**
1625, rue St-Antoine
Lachine QC H8S 1T8
Téléphone : (514) 855-4197 Télécopieur : (514) 637-1739

June 16th 2016

Dear Sir or Madam,

The following letter is in reference to Mr. Jeremy Richman and the recent development and delivery of his educational program ***Make Your Life Your Business***. The purpose of his research was to determine how an experiential learning program that is designed around entrepreneurship can be tied to the acquisition of fundamental life skills and literacy levels while empowering young adults. The Contact Program is part of the Centre d'Éducation des adultes de LaSalle (Marguerite-Bourgeoys School Board) offering Social Integration Services (SIS) to young adults who present intellectual challenges. The Centre endeavors to assist the student to develop competencies and positive attitudes necessary for success in the program and for social integration within the community.

Jeremy Richman's twelve week program generated some interesting and very encouraging results amongst the participants. The students warmed up to him quickly and were very engaged and intrigued by the program. Many students performed very well in areas that are often challenging for them. We all appreciated Jeremy's efforts and expertise. We found Jeremy to be dynamic, warm and he had a great approach with our students. We are hopeful to see this type of program developed further for use in our integration center and elsewhere.

Sincerely yours,



Ginette Lapierre, team leader
Programme Contact
Centre d'éducation des adultes de LaSalle
1625, rue St-Antoine. Lachine (H8S 1T8)
514-855-4197