

Emergent Selves, Emergent Lives: The Role of Curriculum in the Identity Development  
of Undergraduate Students—A Narrative Phenomenological Study

by

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M. Ed., from University of Victoria, 1991

B.A., from Carleton University, 1975

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University of Victoria

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

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The present study examined the self-learning experiences of 12 university students nearing graduation in order to understand the role of curriculum in the development of identity. This inquiry was conducted as a narrative study within a systems theory framework to examine the factors influencing higher education. The study used two rounds of open-ended interviews, separated by a researcher-created interpretation of participants' stories so that students could confirm their experiences and contextual influences. These included familial, cultural, and social factors. Phenomenological analysis revealed a process of repeating cycles of Disorientation and Reorientation in participants' self-learning experiences. Sites of learning included predominantly Expectations/Experiences and Learning to Manage Relationships. A directional theme of Seeking/Finding Fit appeared in areas such as Discipline, Program Fit, and Career. This trajectory showed distinct patterns of engagement, both in learning and social and community settings. Findings suggest that experiences outside the classroom contributed most powerfully to self-learning. Results indicate a lack of awareness of personal values or their role in finding disciplinary or career preference, and a lack of understanding of the ways students could apply their academic and self-learning to the world beyond post-secondary education. Opportunities for critical self-reflection appeared to contribute to the development of insight and self-awareness, but few opportunities occurred in classroom learning experiences. While all participants could be described as academically successful, a strong relationship between academic performance and self-knowledge was not apparent. The findings suggest that certain curriculum strategies encourage identity

development in undergraduate students. These strategies use integrated, experiential learning with opportunities for self-reflection, and include interdisciplinary approaches to teaching and learning.

## Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	v
List of Tables .....	viii
List of Figures .....	ix
Transcription/Symbol Key:.....	x
Acknowledgments.....	xi
Dedication .....	xii
Preface.....	xiii
The Student and the Reason: A Parable.....	xiii
Chapter 1. Introduction and Context.....	1
The Problem.....	1
Background to the Study: Why Identity, Why Now?.....	2
Global Socio-economic Context.....	4
Higher Education Today .....	6
The Research Field .....	9
Defining Curriculum.....	11
Purpose of the Research.....	16
The Research Questions.....	16
Conclusion .....	17
Chapter 2. Literature Review .....	18
Introduction.....	18
Systems Theory.....	19
Emergence.....	20
Self/Identity: Definitions and Theories.....	21
Ego Identity and other Developmental Theories. ....	23
Student Learning.....	34
Faculty Members and Scholarship.....	36
Structure of the Academy. ....	40
Trans-disciplinarity. ....	42
Global Context: What the World Needs Now .....	46
Constructivism(s).....	48
Career Development Theory and Systems Theory. ....	49
Philosophical Considerations of a Methodology .....	51
Conclusion .....	53
Chapter 3. Methodology .....	55
Introduction.....	55
Qualitative Research in Educational Settings .....	55
Methodological Approach: Narrative .....	57
Purpose and Scope of the Study.....	58
Sampling and Participants.....	59
Recruitment strategies.....	61
Interviews.....	63

The Interview Guide .....	64
Piloting the Guide. ....	65
Perception Checking.....	66
Participants' Stories.....	69
Researcher Assumptions (Epistemology/Ontology).....	70
The Ethics of Relationship.....	72
Reflexivity.....	72
Validity.....	73
Trustworthiness.....	75
The Audit Trail.....	75
Conclusion .....	76
Chapter 4. Analysis and Results .....	78
Introduction.....	78
Analysis.....	79
Demographics: An Overview .....	84
Participant Snapshots .....	85
Emergent Themes .....	100
Family, Community, and Culture as Foundational Context .....	100
Ethnicity and Culture. ....	100
Being Different: Gender, Class and Ethnicity. ....	101
Values. ....	105
Experience: Disorientation and Reorientation .....	114
Expectations and Experience. ....	116
Managing Relationships (Partnered).....	121
Managing Relationships (Friends and Social Networks).....	124
Approaches to Learning: Interpersonal or Impersonal .....	128
Interpersonal Learners. ....	128
Impersonal Learners.....	133
Trajectory: Seeking/Finding Fit—Discipline, Program Fit, and Career.....	135
Approaches to Participation in Community.....	140
Full Participation.....	142
Peripheral Participation.....	142
Sources of Engagement: The Curriculum and the Co-curriculum.....	145
Epistemology and Ontology: Contextual Knowing and Transitional Feeling.....	150
Emergence: Identity Development as Experiential Process or Processual Experience?.....	159
Conclusion .....	160
Chapter 5. Discussion and Implications.....	162
Introduction.....	162
How Do Students Learn about Themselves as Adults? .....	168
Culture as a Site of Identity Work. ....	172
How Does University Education Influence Students' Self-learning?.....	173
The Role of Integrative Learning.....	176
Interdisciplinarity.....	177
Other Forms of Experiential Learning.....	181
What Do Students See Themselves as Having Gained?.....	182

The Relationship between Self-learning and “the Real World” .....	184
Revisiting the Change Model.....	186
Limitations: Who Was Not Present. ....	188
Limitations: Research Design. ....	189
Limitations: Researcher Competence. ....	190
Questions for Further Research .....	191
Conclusion .....	191
Coda .....	195
References .....	198
Appendix A. Faculty Letter .....	217
Appendix B. In-class Script .....	218
Appendix C. Research Poster .....	220
Appendix D. Informed Consent Letter .....	221
Appendix E. Second Interview Informed Consent Form.....	226
Appendix F. Withdrawal Form .....	227
Appendix G. Interview Guide .....	228
Appendix H. Interview Prompts .....	233
Appendix I. Participant Stories .....	234

**List of Tables**

Table 1. Participant Demographics..... 60

**List of Figures**

Figure 1. Change Model for Higher Education .....	15
Figure 2. Hermeneutic “Circling” .....	83
Figure 3. The Identity Spiral .....	167

## Transcription/Symbol Key

To help the reader understand how I used editorial and descriptive symbols in consistent ways throughout the research process, the following list indicates the primary symbols utilized and the functions they filled:

- [ ] Square brackets indicate an editorial addition, adding descriptive information to assist the reader in understanding the flow or context of the speech being quoted.
- ( ) Round brackets reveal the interviewer voice, asking clarifying questions, prompting, reflecting or interpreting the participant's speech to prompt further exploration.
- . . . Three dots (ellipsis) indicate a section of the text has been omitted to enhance continuity or exclude sections that do not relate to the context being illustrated.
- A right-facing arrow indicates movement toward, most often signalling change from one point in time to another or "becomes." This is used in the chart Participant Demographics.

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Finally, and most importantly, thanks to my children and all the other learners who are faced with the challenge of making this world different for themselves, for their communities and for the planet. I learn from you every day.

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to the memory of my mother, Margaret Sheppard. I miss you every day and am so grateful for everything you gave me in life.

## Preface

### **The Student and the Reason: A Parable<sup>1</sup>**

Once upon a time there was a Good Student. Student learned all day and worked hard at Reading and Writing and going to Student Classes. One day, Student remembered that a long time ago Someone had told him that there would be an “After-Student,” that his Learning was for a Reason. Student thought, “Oh, I wonder what the Reason is? Am I learning well? I must be because I am a Good Student,” and he continued on his way.

Some time later, Student went to School and was given a Black Robe. He was told, “Walk across the stage and don’t forget to stop so the Person in the Big Chair can bonk you on the head with their hat.” Student did as he was told because that’s what Good Students do, although he wondered what he had done to make the Person want to bonk him on the head. Then Someone took the Robe back and all the other Robes left and Student found himself alone in the big Hall.

At first, Student cried and felt sad it was over, and then he laughed and felt happy it was over, but mostly he felt confused because he knew he hadn’t learned the Reason.

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<sup>1</sup> “Student and The Reason” was originally written in the Coyote parable style as part of an assignment for a course called Curriculum Implementation, taught by Dr. Pat O’Riley. Powerfully moved by the teaching wisdom in Indigenous literatures, this represented part of my effort to describe the research problem I was grappling with.

*A particular signature of interpretive inquiry is self-reflexivity. Writers often make a point of identifying places in their studies where they have become aware of inadequacies of their pre-understandings. . . . Wherever it occurs, this reflection is the thread that holds the research story together. (Ellis, 1998)*

This research project is about the Reason. It addresses the conscious and unconscious movement, the learning, the struggles, and the transformation in the sense of self in a group of university students. This self-learning occurs in the larger context of their family, community, and in their academic learning experience. The process of this self-learning has been reflected in the evolution of my understanding as I have sought to comprehend the elements, interconnections, and the wholeness of the complex, self-organizing system of which I am a part.

As a counsellor in a mid-sized western Canadian university, I have worked with students at various points in their journey through their university education for the past eighteen years. At some point in the last ten years, I began to feel uncomfortable in the ways in which I worked with students as they made sense of their education, integrated their personal and career visions or just wanted to know what job they could look for after graduation. This dissatisfaction was reinforced by student perceptions that their degree was not worth anything and by reports of the increasing difficulty in finding career-related work. At the same time, government publications began to demand greater accountability in the form of educational outcomes, while academic writing warned of the hazards of university education becoming vocational training only, and pointed out the dangers of the increasingly business-centred approach of post-secondary institutions. As I examined materials to help me in my work, my frustration increased. I found information, but none of it addressed the complexities I saw or the gaps I encountered in

students' thinking and knowledge. When I consulted faculty about the phenomenon I was seeing, the students I was describing were problematized as troubled. In fact, these were not just counselling clients, but students encountered in grad-year orientation workshops, career exploration groups, student volunteer programs, and in-class presentations. As I said in more than one conversation, "It's not even that they [students] haven't connected the dots [in their education, identity, and career development possibilities], it's that they don't even know there are dots to connect!" Moreover, my own disturbance continued to grow as I worked with students who seemed so inundated with information that they appeared to have forgotten that learning how to ask good questions is at least as important as knowing the right answers.

During the 2002-3 academic year, I was granted a study leave. I took the opportunity to attend the University of British Columbia (UBC) as an unclassified student in higher education. Materials I uncovered in the career-development field and in the disciplines of psychology, education, sociology, ecology, and global economic development contributed to my impression that different disciplines addressed some aspects of the problem. None addressed the big picture—the constellation of factors, information, influences, and systems affecting disciplinary and structural fragmentation.

Miller (2007) cited Alschuler's (1980) claims about three major principles of Freirian philosophy. These principles provide some clues to my learning journey. The first principle, involving "creating a world in which it is easier to love" (p. 154), describes the disorienting events (Mezirow, 1991) I experienced during my first course as a doctoral student at the University of Victoria (UVic). A seminar on participatory action research challenged me to recognize how I could perpetuate oppressive social and power-

related inequities by not examining my lenses as I explored various approaches to research. This initial learning encounter was an invitation to wrestle with my embedded assumptions through poetry, story and music. It was wholly unsettling and ultimately transformative. I remember feelings of mistrust and fear at the prospect of inviting my heart and creative spirit into my experience of doctoral studies. Memories of earlier manifestations of my identified Learner self flooded in, mixed with shame about remembered criticisms of my “emotional, overly poetic” writing as a young girl and a belief that those parts of my Learner self were sweet but not academically or socially useful. Somewhere during that first doctoral course I made a commitment to myself that this time (*this* manifestation of Learner self) I would not try to prove my worth by splitting off my heart, reflecting only the objective, fragmented aspects of self I imagined acceptable to the academy. I had to find a way to stop apologizing for my search for a more holistic, engaging form of educating citizens. All of me was going to School.

Alschuler’s second Freirian principle relates to “developing the ability of people to create their own world” (Miller, 2007, p. 154). My work as a counsellor in a post-secondary setting is aptly described in the above statement. What matters to me most in my work is accompanying students for a time on that developmental journey, assisting them as they struggle to articulate their world view. How little I understood at the outset of my doctoral program that I also needed to re-think *my* world view (over and over) as I struggled to adjust my lenses, recognize my stance, and stay mindful to St. Julien’s (2002) admonition to adopt knowledge as situated and social, “located not in a single place in the individual mind but . . . distributed in an activity system that encompasses the world, the self, and the other” (p. 259).

In Alschuler's third Freirian principle of social literacy this project hopes to offer some "problem solving strategies" (Miller, p. 155). Chief among the reflexive challenges in my learning process has been about the literature and trying to name the conflicts or problems I was studying. Each time I thought I had a grasp of the systemic elements and the dynamics that might influence their function, I would feel a momentary "Aha," which I began to recognize would be followed by a nagging thought asking me what assumptions I needed to question. I have begun to see this as an evolutionary spiral and have found Kegan's (1982) model of subject-object evolution helpful, in that I can hope that my situated blindness (the subject of my experience) will evolve to become the seen and understood (object of my understanding). The emergent nature of my learning journey has meant that that "objective" understanding can quickly become the embodied confusion of my next nexus of learning. In Antoinette Oberg's doctoral seminar I learned the importance of using my own identity development as a tool, and the value of regular, sustained writing-as-praxis.

In the curriculum offerings of William Doll, the spiritual aspects of "the call from the stranger" (Wang, 2002) helped me understand my sense of urgency in understanding the role of curriculum in helping humans understand their place in "the web of life" (Bateson, 1980, 1991; Capra, 1996). Such a shift moved this project from an earlier focus on a school-to-work transition to an inquiry of engagement, community, and global citizenship. The project used school-to-work transition as the site, a point of "aliveness" in students' search for identity, meaning, and purpose in their university education. In this shift I have learned that preparing students for the world of work, without their having learned about their responsibility to contribute to the future of the whole world, runs

counter to my sense of integrity. Wrestling with my own values in this dilemma has forced me to clarify my beliefs, my philosophical and epistemological stance, my *identity* as a researcher in the learning enterprise and as a participant in the human enterprise.

Chapter 1 explores some of the tensions in the often politically charged environment of higher education. It describes the context, the site of the research interest: understanding the role of curriculum in university students' identity development. It explains why the development of a sense of self is so important at this time.

Chapter 2 examines the literature reviewed as part of this inquiry through various lenses.

Chapter 3 describes the research undertaken, the methodological approach, and research process. It introduces the students who volunteered to participate in the research project. Their stories have breathed life into my research questions.

Chapter 4 relates the narrative-phenomenological analysis of the interview data and explicates the emerging themes, individual and intersecting, from the interview data, illustrated by the voices of the participants.

Chapter 5 relates the themes to the research questions and discusses implications, shortcomings of the research, and further questions for future exploration.

In sum, the document explores the many names, the patterns, the fractal of the Reason. The word fractal is used here deliberately to honour the influence of Dr. William Doll in introducing me to the concept of complexity and systems theory. Complexity is referred to as fractal precisely because it is not a single theory—it is trans-theoretical and highly interdisciplinary, seeking the answers to some fundamental questions about living, adaptable, unpredictable systems.

## Chapter 1. Introduction and Context

*Pedagogy lies at the heart of the transformation of our next generation; its function is to invent the conditions of invention. (Hwu, 1998, in Pinar 1998)*

*From the very nature of development, it is understood that there can be no conflict between proper education and preparation for later life. (Foundations of Curriculum-Making, National Society for the Study of Education, 1925, in Hamilton, 1990)*

### **The Problem**

Every generation of university students shows characteristics that distinguish them from previous generations. Social scientists study such differences in disciplines ranging from sociology, economics, and psychology to education (Cote, 2000; Cote & Levine, 2002; Foote, 1996; Levine, 2006; Torres, Howard-Hamilton, & Cooper, 2003; Twenge, 2006). Some of the characteristics that distinguish the current generation of university students from earlier generations include increased difficulty with the school-to-work transition (Andres & Grayson, 2003; Livingstone, 2003) and higher incidence of mental health problems including depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation (Association of University and College Counseling Center Directors Survey, 2008; UVic Counselling Services comparative data, "Severe Concerns by Academic Year," 1989-2008). Evidence of an increased sense of entitlement exists, which Twenge (2006) attributed to educational programs and well-intended parents focusing for decades on building self-esteem without self-control in children, leading to an inflated sense of self with few coping or relationship skills. Moreover, this generation of university students shows evidence of a pervasive lack of strong self-development (Cote, 2000; Twenge, 2006). Psycho-social studies in psychology and sociology (Arnett, 2000; Cote & Levine, 2002) point to a delay in

young peoples' transition into what society designates "adult" roles of social contribution, while popular journalism points out the disaffection evident in a population that appears, in many ways, to have many material advantages and opportunities (Levine, 2006).

It would be reasonable to concentrate on the psycho-social problems of this generation as the rationale to study their experience of identity development or self-learning in university; however, that would address only one part of a large and complex problem. This trans-disciplinary study is unusual in that it uses a systems-theory approach to identify the complex of individual, interpersonal, institutional, sociological, economic, cultural, and political factors influencing the self-learning experience of undergraduate students.

### **Background to the Study: Why Identity, Why Now?**

Drucker (2000) stated, "For the first time—literally—substantial and rapidly growing numbers of people have choices. For the first time, they will have to manage themselves. And society is totally unprepared for it" (p. 8). Drucker explained that self-knowledge is essential for self-management. This generation of citizens will be asked to make self-management decisions more frequently, and with potentially greater consequences, than any previous generation. Ironically, this generation appears to have greater difficulty than previous generations with the process of self-learning. University students today have been consistently educated to believe that they need more and more education to participate fully in the knowledge economy. An apparent by-product of this necessity may be the delay of what Erikson (1968) defined as the decade of identity development. At the time of his landmark study of psycho-social development, the world moved more slowly, the grand narratives still operated, if challenged by

evidence of post-modern revolutions. Fifty years later, it is a time of massive instability, complexity and multiple perspectives of truth; a strong sense of self is essential to individuals. Irrespective of culture, it is no longer possible to make assumptions about the world and what is right. Globally, individuals are bombarded with information, with decisions to make about their own lives, and about what they believe is most important or correct at the moment of decision-making. More information is contained in one week of a newspaper such as the New York Times than most people one hundred years ago consumed in a lifetime (Fox, 2008).

The subject of “self,” some say, has recently “fallen on hard times” (Gergen, 2000; Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). However, Erikson’s (1968) seminal work on the psychosocial development of identity, though appropriately critiqued for its dated depiction of sex and gender roles, remains relevant in the literature. Kroger (2004) noted that Erikson’s theory is, in this age of “contextual, narrative, and post-modern influences,” one of the first examples of developmental contextualism. Developmental contextualism stresses that understanding developmental change does not lie in examining the individual alone nor in exploring the social context, but in the interaction between the two over time (p. xiii). Erikson’s theory suggests that identity development is a stage of psychosocial growth, lasting from adolescence through the early twenties. While some developmental psychologists (Arnett, 2002) believe that this phase of development is, in most post-industrial countries, being pushed later into the twenties by our global demands for educated citizens, it is generally accepted that the psychosocial “work” of young adults is to answer the twin identity questions: “Who am I? How do I fit into the adult world?” (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006, p. 4). Some sociologists examine this delay (Cote & Allahaar, 1993) in light of “complex circumstances” (p. xv) manipulating the experience of young adults in a post-modern political economy. Some of the circumstances identified by

Cote and Allahar (1993; Cote, 2000) include the extension of the “coming of age” period in highly industrialized countries since the 1950s resulting in youth’s diminishing ability to participate in the labour force, a rise in credentialism which forces young people to stay in school longer to attain adult (earning) status, and the development of the youth market as consumers of leisure, information, and high technology sectors. While these sectors are developed and produced by adults, they create a youth dependence on external, rather than internal determinants of self (pp. xvi-xvii), something Levine (2006) associated with diminished internal purpose or motivation. All of the above contribute to the salience of identity development in young people in general and, for the purposes of this study, of undergraduate university students in particular.

### **Global Socio-economic Context**

Today we are in the midst of a global process of destabilization and increasing uncertainty. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recently invited Edgar Morin, director emeritus of research at the Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques (CNRS) to elaborate on his ideas for an education based on a reform of thought. To build a sustainable future, UNESCO states, human society must undergo a transformation. Sustainability is linked with themes of democracy, equity, social justice, peace, and harmony with our natural environment. Humans must learn to place the notion of “durability” at the base of “our way of living, of governing our nations and communities, of interacting on a global scale” (Morin, 2001).

In the 2002 Speech from the Throne, Canadians were told we needed another kind of transformation:

The economy of the 21st century will need workers who are lifelong learners, who can respond and adapt to change. Canada's labour market programs must be transformed to meet this challenge.

Employers complain that they need workers who have not only sophisticated knowledge, but who can continue to learn, think creatively and flexibly in areas no longer defined by clear parameters and longstanding traditions (Evers, Rush, & Berdrow, 1998; Rush & Evers, 1986). The Conference Board of Canada, one of the foremost not-for-profit applied research organizations in Canada, has ranked our country with 16 other highly developed nations for 2008, on a range of social and economic indicators. While we rated well in terms of education, Canada is seen to be losing ground and rates poorly (16<sup>th</sup> out of 17 countries) in areas such as innovation, the environment, and society (using measures for such things as rates of crime, poverty—particularly for children—and homelessness).

From another sector come reports of a deterioration of the social charter between higher education and the public and calls for re-invigorating that commitment to the role of higher education in responding to community voices, calling for leadership in the real-life interactions of post-secondary campuses and their local communities (Kezar, Chambers, Burkhardt et al. 2005; Langseth & Plater, 2004). Increasingly, (ironically, perhaps, influenced by the growing competition for post-secondary students) scholars are examining the undergraduate experience (Bok, 2006; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt et al., 2005). Addressing these complex problems could require a shift in educators' focus from their teaching to student learning.

This project examines the conflict between the demands for increased vocational relevance on the one hand, and disciplinary discourses struggling under post modernity's challenges to "master narratives," on the other (Lyotard, 1984). Higher education needs to

concentrate on student learning as a means to reconnect with its public mission (Bok, 2003; Kezar et al., 2005) and to ensure that tomorrow's citizens are resilient, responsive and adaptive. Today, standing at that intersection is a generation of undergraduate students, waiting for the lights to change so they can get on with their lives. There is increasing evidence (Jarvis, 2001) that the futures they are seeking are best situated in a strong sense of self. "Self" in the post-modern condition no longer simply mediates the individual's representations of things, which could be assumed to have a constancy, allowing for rules to be generated which could be applicable to all students; rather, multiple social and cultural contexts can be seen to be part of the active creation and synthesis of a self that mediates uncertainty and ever-present change. Sarup (1996) argued that any study of identity must be localized in space and time, and must include consideration of the effect of social dynamics such as class, ethnicity, gender, and religion.

In a 1980 publication that has surprising relevance today, Hextall and Sarup pointed to the notion of the "spheres" of occupation and education as separate features of the social world. This dualistic construction continues to manifest what Dow (1990) has described as crippling the analysis of the complex middle ground between ideologically drawn extremes. Today the separation of education and work continues to show evidence of such binary thinking. To expand such binaries as higher learning versus professional or vocational training requires an analysis of the complex system and its parts.

### **Higher Education Today**

Universities are challenged to re-examine their vision of higher education (Boyer, 1990; Jarvis, 2001; Pocklington & Tupper, 2002). One aspect of this challenge stems from escalating complexity and rapid change in the global environment, which raises questions about the ways in

which higher education has traditionally prepared graduates to work effectively in the world (Fisher & Rubenson, 1998). Other challenges arise from demands from governments, employers, and parents, calling for greater emphasis on helping students prepare themselves for the world of work beyond students' completion of their undergraduate degree (Brown, Green, & Lauder, 2001). University administrators are finding funding attached to outcomes, demands for accountability and an increasingly corporate organizational structure (BC Labour Force Development Board, 1995; Gibbons et al., 1994). In the midst of these external pressures, universities are finding themselves competing for students as forms of post-secondary education increase and population growth decreases in Canada and other developed nations, contributing to a market-driven approach to student recruitment (Fisher & Rubenson, 1998; Zemsky, 2003).

Education and higher education in particular has been viewed as the means of understanding and resolving difficult human, social, environmental, and political problems. Higher education seen from other viewpoints has been charged with the modernist responsibility for pure research: the search for new knowledge and truth (Jarvis, 2001; Kerr, 1991). It is seen as providing the skilled and knowledgeable workers of the future, contributing to the economic viability of every developed nation (Morin, 2001). In the last few decades, higher education has been criticized as a site of cultural and social reproduction (Bourdieu, 1973; Bowers, 1984). Education tied to traditional assumptions of citizenship has been accused of giving way to corporate and right wing demands for professional, technically trained, credentialized workers (Foucault, 1991; Mourad, 1997). These views are embedded in a history of universities as broad and deep as recorded memory (Pedersen, 1997; Reuben, 1996).

In the last hundred years, the degree and pace of growth and change, in terms of knowledge, technology, economic development, and social and political complexity, has

continued to escalate, dominated by an increased interdependence in human social, political, environmental, and economic realms. In the midst of such advances, these complexities reveal evidence of long-standing problems: poverty, racism, violence, environmental degradation, and vast inequities of access to power, wealth, and knowledge.

Higher education may be one of those structures that contribute equally to the problems of increased complexity and rate of global change, and to the search for solutions. Tensions exist which have the capacity to hold the culture and behaviours in academia in a form of stasis. These tensions dwell between the structure of the institution and its disciplinary divisions, between the emphasis on knowledge creation through research (along with the prestige that externally funded research brings to a university) (Massey, 2003), and knowledge dissemination through the development of the scholarship of teaching, particularly at the undergraduate level (Margolis, 2001; Terenzini, 1999).

Massey (2003) wrote of the intrinsic seeking of prestige that is part of most universities' research mission. In most 20<sup>th</sup> century universities in Europe and North America, prestige has been associated with grant-funded research (Pocklington & Tupper, 2002). It will be essential, in the next decade, to work to balance that prestige with a valuing of excellence in teaching (facilitating learning). Boyer (1990, 1996), in his well-known reports to the Carnegie Foundation, documented the issue of scholarship in the academy, identifying faculty and students as losing out, and calling for improvement in the quality of undergraduate education. Smith (1991) authored a similar report in Canada. Both called for greater emphasis on the quality of undergraduate education and a shift in reward systems to reflect that emphasis. Perhaps Boyer's greatest legacy was his vision of a new American College that sought to reconnect learning to its ethical base. Boyer believed that students and faculty have a large commitment to make to their

communities. Creating change of that order would require strategies that “mine into the DNA of the institution” (Jackson, 2008) to change institutional culture, values, and practices at all levels. Calls for change and challenges to existing structures and methodologies are as ancient as schooling itself. This study situates itself in a long and rich history of the study of education, while seeking to transcend traditional disciplinary and conceptual boundaries by using systems theory as a framework to explore the site and questions of the proposed research.

### **The Research Field**

Of the considerable number of empirical studies of student learning in higher education, many relate to academic achievement, cognitive development, learning styles, barriers to learning, and so on (King & Kitchener, 1994; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perry, 1999; Terenzini, 1999). Pascarella and Terenzini have published two massive meta-analytic reviews covering three decades of research on the impact of college on students. Their most recent (2005) edition includes an expanded volume of evidence on areas of diversity, a greater range of types of institutions studied, and a more expanded repertoire of research methods.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) criticized the studies of identity development in college students before the 1990s as generally weak methodologically, with inconsistent results. Those pre-nineties studies examined such influences as academic majors, finding that disciplinary differences did not appear to affect self-concept, but stating there was some indication that departmental environments might be influential. Living on campus rather than commuting was shown to increase both academic and social self-concept. Of the more recent quantitative studies of general personal development, many have been based on self-report questionnaires, reflecting the progress students report since beginning their experience at their institution of higher learning.

In sum, the quantitative measures of change reported by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) suggest that changes in identity formation and self-understanding are slight, with an aggregate of students gaining in their academic and social self-concepts. However, Pascarella and Terenzini acknowledged that these data mask the proportion of students who might have shifted in the opposite direction, becoming more negative in dimensions measured. In other words, the concept of identity development does not lend itself easily to large, generalizable studies, in part because of the complex, contextual differences in students' lives and experiences.

In the research conducted in the 1990s, most American studies of identity development evaluated by Pascarella and Terenzini examined the influences of various kinds of course, such as service learning or participating in community projects. These studies, although predominantly qualitative and single-institution based (thus limiting generalizability), nonetheless produced consistent results. The results suggested that “academically related experiences may be a factor in identity development, but also suggest a need for further investigation” [emphasis added] (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 240). I will expand on this survey of the literature in chapter 2.

This study, while examining identity development through students' stories of their self-learning experiences, adds to the body of knowledge in Canada in general, and specifically at this institution: no study of student identity development has been conducted at this university before. In addition, the theoretical framework is unique in acknowledging the various systemic and environmental factors influencing the process, bridging the micro-developmental and macro-environmental factors.

The next section examines the definition of curriculum as encompassing sites of self-learning for undergraduate students.

## Defining Curriculum

The word *curriculum* in the form *vitae curriculum* was first used by Calvinist scholars to mean *course* or *career of life* (Hamilton, 1990, p. 28). This inquiry examines the role of curriculum, as broadly defined above, in the self-learning of traditional-aged university students as part of their preparation for that course or career of life. However, *curriculum* is also used in higher education literature to refer to the academic, course-based learning that typically defines a university degree program. Often the term is juxtaposed with *co-curriculum*, which typically describes services and programs that support the student's developmental or learning experience, such as those housed in divisions of Student Affairs. This inquiry explores the complex environment of higher education and so at times uses the term *curriculum* in its broadest dimension (Hamilton) and at other times, in its more traditional academic institutional dimension. In so doing, I ask the reader to consider the influences of disciplinary knowledge, personal history (including family, culture, and lived experience) *and* to consider the question of what and how students learn—in curricular and co-curricular settings—during their undergraduate experience that contributes most to their self-learning and identity development.

One of the most challenging aspects of curricular inquiry at this point in history exists in the modern or post-modern miasma of the tacit, embedded modernist drives for stability, control, efficiency, and dichotomous measures of effectiveness (Currie & Newson, 1998) conflicting with the critical reappraisal of modern modes of thought. While some curricular scholars believe we are living in a post-modern world, (Doll, 1993), there remains enough evidence of deeply embedded modernist beliefs about human goals, and what constitutes progress, success and achievement, that have passed underground (Blades, 2007; Jameson, 1984).

The study of education has long been fraught with divergent ideas. There have, however, been consistent themes in this rich and complex field that are as illuminating today as when they were first written. One of these is found in the work of John Dewey, American pragmatist philosopher and curriculumist. Dewey was one of the first North American scholars in this discipline to conceive of the human brain as “a biological organ that could be harnessed in the service of humankind” (Hamilton, 1990, p. 57). Dewey saw a role for education in creating citizens who could self-actualize and whose ability to learn and grow could support the democratic evolution of society he viewed as essential. This inquiry is situated in the midst of a change process in higher education that demands a reorientation to that creative, contributing role.

Identity has had an important place in curriculum studies for some time. As the discipline of curriculum studies has focused its kaleidoscopic gaze on its own identity, the questions generated have contributed to debate over the role of curriculum in education. The use of self, Goodson (1998) has predicted, will generate much of the [curricular] contest in the next epoch. “Identity is no longer an ascribed status or place in an established order; rather identity is an ongoing project, most commonly an ongoing narrative project” (p. 4). In disciplines ranging from philosophy to history, literary criticism to psychology, sociology, and anthropology, many scholars have studied this human concept. Chapter 2 will explore some of the literature illustrating disciplinary definitions of self. What this chapter has sought to do is to explore why the concept of self and identity is of particular interest at this time. This form of learning is perhaps more important now than it has ever been. At the same time, there is mounting evidence that traditionally aged students may be struggling with that process in ways that previous generations have not.

The figure (below) depicts a change process that I observe in higher education. It represents a model for that change process, illustrating relationships, influences, and directional shifts. The model includes three key areas in higher education that capture aspects of the change process relating to this inquiry:

1. *Curriculum and Pedagogy*, representing both the disciplinary nature of knowledge and the developing emphasis on the scholarship of teaching and learning;
2. *The relationship between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs*, historically one of service and support to the academic mission, now evolving into an interdependent, mutually beneficial relationship in the service of the institutional mission, in particular:
  - “Employing our core strengths to benefit our external communities—locally, regionally, nationally and internationally—and promoting civic engagement and global citizenship” (UVic Strategic Plan, 2007, p. 6).
  - The university uses Thomas Ehrlich’s definition of civic engagement as: “Working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference” (Ehrlich, 2000);
3. *The role of work and volunteer experience*, both in its historical role and in its re-visioned contribution to learning: experiential learning, creating context for integrating theoretical content and self-learning.

The four boxes outside the circle represent some of the most pressing, complex influences affecting the change process in which higher-education systems are engaged:

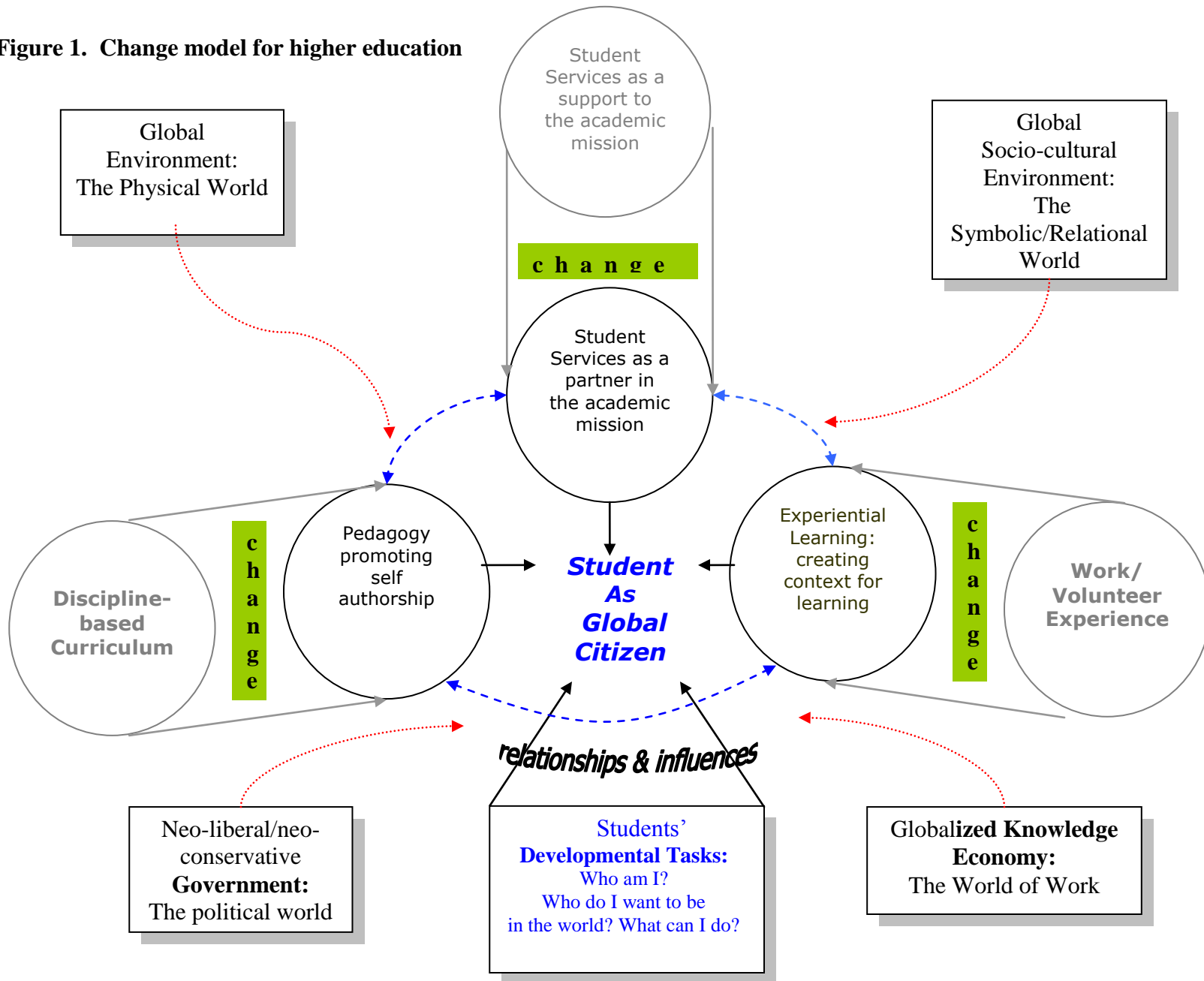
- The global physical environment and our human need to redefine our relationship to earth;

- The global socio-cultural environment, representing the pressing need for humans to understand and appreciate diverse ways of knowing, believing and being;
- The globalized knowledge economy, representing the global need to redefine sustainability while keeping our local, national, and international economies healthy; and
- Our global governmental and political bodies, with ideologies and policies that are intrinsically linked to the previous three, and which have implications for educational practices at all levels.

The centre of the model represents the desired educational outcome of the civically engaged, global citizen, influenced by students' developmental tasks. The tasks are represented by the questions: "Who am I? Who do I want to be in the world? and What can I do?" These questions signify the heart of this inquiry.

I created this map of the territory as part of a presentation I made during my doctoral seminar. I wanted to explain the context in which to understand how students learn about themselves as "mapmakers" (Wilber, 2000) and contributors to a community, a culture, a country, and a complex and troubled world.

**Figure 1. Change model for higher education**



### **Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of the research is to examine how students learn about themselves as adults in curricular and co-curricular settings while attaining their undergraduate degrees. The study explores what they believe they have gained through their academic experience such as beliefs, interests, skills, and values. The study also explores the relationship between that self-learning and the ways in which they believe they can apply their learning to the “real world,” in their career development and in their engagement with the communities they inhabit.

The study will contribute to answering how students experience their own development while acquiring disciplinary knowledge. It will identify students’ most valued learning while at university and their perceived ability to apply this learning to the transition from school to career-related work and civic engagement.

### **The Research Questions**

1. How do students learn about themselves as adults (workers, citizens, members of communities, and contributors to society) in the process of attaining their undergraduate degrees?
2. How does the experience of university education influence students’ self-learning in curricular and co-curricular settings?
3. What do students see themselves having gained through their academic experience as interests, skills and values?

4. What is the relationship between self-learning and the ways in which they believe they can apply their learning to the “real world” in their career development and in the communities they inhabit?

## **Conclusion**

Chapter 2 will explain the issue discussed in this research into literature on systems theory, constructivism, pedagogy, identity and self, student development, and the research field. Chapter 3 will describe a narrative methodological approach that uses in-depth interviews as a means of understanding how students express their learning about self (identity) and how they see themselves engaging with the world they enter upon graduation. Chapter 4 will describe the narrative phenomenological analytic process used and discuss the resulting themes. Chapter 5 will describe some of the challenges inherent in this work, discuss suggestions for curriculum and program development in higher education, and make suggestions for future study.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

*But what I find most disturbing . . . is a growing feeling . . . that higher education is in fact part of the problem rather than the solution—going still further, that it's become a private benefit, not a public good. Increasingly, the campus is being viewed as a place where students get credentialed and faculty get tenured, while the overall work of the academy does not seem particularly relevant to the nation's most pressing civic, social, economic, and moral problems. (Boyer, 1996)*

*To understand educational experience requires being in the political, racial, aesthetic, spiritual, gendered, global and phenomenological world.*

*(Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995)*

### Introduction

This chapter presents the topics relevant to the research in order to situate the elements and processes comprising the network of system(s) being examined. It is important to acknowledge that the written word and the structural organization of presenting information imply a linearity and an order that the reader might see as a causal or contributing relationship. I ask the reader to note that all of the elements and the processes through which they interact are described as dynamic, malleable, and not fixed in their interrelationships.

The first section addresses the conceptual framework of the project by discussing systems theory and the concept of emergence in order to situate theories of learning and development, pedagogy and student development theories. The next section discusses the role of context, global and institutional. Subsequently, career development theories and systems approaches to vocational theory re examined. The chapter closes with some philosophical considerations on methodology.

## Systems Theory

This study is based on systems theory. One of the primary challenges of writing from a systems' perspective in a study of higher education lies in acknowledging the implications and influences of the breadth of the topic at hand, while limiting discussion to a manageable depth.

In order to illustrate the systemic worldview, this section will describe some of the distinctions between the networked knowledge era (Allen & Cherrey, 2000) and the industrial era from which it emerged. In the industrial era, the elements of a system were considered primary. That is, an organization such as an institution of higher education was viewed as consisting of independent parts, each with its own purpose and function and which, like parts of a machine, could be fixed or repaired if the organization was not functioning as it should. Knowledge was viewed as something man-made (such as a building) and our *working* metaphors reflect those *fundamental* principles, the *basic building blocks* of its *structure*. Allen and Cherrey (2000) labelled this a fragmented, hierarchical worldview stemming from the industrial era. Causality was seen to be linear, change was incremental and there was a "simple complexity" inherent in the operation of such a system. In this organizational view, a single point (person, office, department) could control change in the system.

Systems thinking requires a shift in focus from the parts to the whole. From a mechanistic construct, the system shifts to a network construct. Such a metaphor implies that there are, in fact, no fundamental constants; none of the properties of any part of this web is fundamental because they all follow from the properties of the other parts. The consistency of their interrelation determines the structure of the entire web (Capra, 1996).

A systemic view stirs the epistemic pot, such that the phenomena described by any one discipline or theory are no more fundamental than another, but rather belong to different systems levels. Thus epistemology—understanding the processes of knowledge—has to be included in the description of phenomena (Capra, 1996). In a study of student-identity development, this necessitates an understanding of the interaction among the complex components of student development, institutional structure, disciplinary structures, and global and local contexts. This section attempts an inclusive description of context, structure, and process. A non-linear, open system operates very differently from what Bertalanffy (1973) called “steady state.” This chapter will attempt to describe the *Fliessgleichgewicht*, or “flowing balance” of the dynamic processes inherent in the self-learning experience of students in the system of higher education.

### **Emergence.**

The concept of *emergence* is related to developmental theory and to theories of creativity (Sawyer et al., 2003), as well as inquiry in the human sciences (Polkinghorne, 1988). As a construct, emergence refers to the “arising of novel and coherent structures, patterns, and properties during the process of self-organization in complex systems” (Goldstein, 1999). For some time, research has been conducted in scientific and mathematical fields to explain characteristics and laws in different types of complex systems (Bertalanffy, 1973; Bohm, 1980; Prigogine & Stengers, 1984). In disciplines from organizational science to psychology (Abraham & Gilgen, 1995; Goldstein, 1999), emergence is useful as a concept when the dynamics of a system can be better understood by seeing an across-system organization rather than the parts or properties alone. The

interplay between the parts and the whole is often emphasized in studies of complex, self-organizing systems.

As a concept, *emergence* can be traced historically to theories attributed to a group of scholars known as the “British emergentists.” Philosophers Broad, Morgan, and Whitehead (1925) have been associated with this group. Other theorists whose work reflects the 19<sup>th</sup> century interest in evolution include Darwin, Piaget, and Vygotsky (Sawyer et al., 2003). Piaget’s (1970) work on genetic epistemology uses the concept of emergence to describe the construction of “novelties” in the development of knowledge. In emergentism, each stage emerges from the process and activity of the prior stage and is thus a result of organism-environment interaction.

Bateson (1980) sought to uncover “the pattern which connects.” This study seeks to understand (a) how students find the patterns that connect them to that which is important and meaningful in their learning; and (b) how they find the pattern that connects them to their sense of identity or self, to the world of work, and to the world of human engagement beyond degree completion.

### **Self/Identity: Definitions and Theories**

Exploring the myriad definitions and uses of the terms *self* and *identity* in the educational, sociological, and psychological literatures could be a fascinating study in itself, taking into account (for example) perspectives such as social, historical, cultural, or political context, disciplinary lenses, evolution over time, and more. In a recent survey of two peer-reviewed journals on identity and self (*Self and Identity*; *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*) I found articles (Leary, 2004; Cote, 2006) describing the recent growth in research interest in these topics, and pointing out the

importance of researchers' defining their use of such complex terms. Leary listed five broad but distinct categories of usage:

1. As a synonym for "person," as in not having time for oneself;
2. As a synonym for "personality," as in the self as a collection of traits or temperaments, but not as a psycho-social being;
3. Self-as-knower, the I-self or subject self. This use refers to the psychological processes underlying self-awareness. Not to be confused with the seat of consciousness, this use of "self" refers to the processes involved in reflexive cognition or the ability to focus one's attention on and think about oneself. This form of self might be used in models of self-regulation and attention (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001);
4. Self refers to "self-as-known" or "self-as-object"—the perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, evaluations, and feelings people have about themselves; and
5. Self may refer to "agentic self" or "executive self" (Baumeister, 1995).

Katsko (2003) cautioned against connotative or denotative confusion and called for careful explication of terminology. Leary (2004) ultimately settled for an acknowledgement that there would always be debate on definition and proposed, "The self has something to do with processes that underlie the capacity for self-awareness, self-representation, and self-regulation, a set of systems that permit human beings to reflect on themselves and to respond to those self-reflections cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally" (p. 2).

Cote (2006) argued for a field of Identity Studies in the Social Sciences, creating a taxonomic approach to defining multiple dimensions of identity based on researcher

motivation (epistemology and worldview). Cote (2006) (Cote & Levine, 2002) saw the embeddedness of problematic identity issues in “mass society” (now referred to as late modernity or post-modernity) as a unifying motivation in order to contribute to social change, educational change and policy development. He cited Marcia’s (1980) definition of ego-identity as “an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history” (p. 159).

### **Ego identity and other developmental theories.**

Erikson’s (1968) landmark exploration of psycho-social development has been considered foundational for many decades. Although critiqued for the rigidity of its stage theory and the ascribed timeframes, and for its focus on male rather than female development, Erikson’s work continues to influence the discipline of psychology in the areas of personality psychology and social psychology in general, and in Marcia’s ego-identity research in particular.

Marcia (1966, 1980, 1994) has built a long career empirically testing and expanding on Erikson’s theory in his ego-identity status research. Marcia’s primary contributions evolved from his efforts to translate Erikson’s “artistically complex” (Marcia, 1994, p. 72) definition of identity into something that could provide a basis for empirical measurement. In his earliest semi-structured interviews with students (1966), Marcia observed that individuals arrived at an identity by different means. By asking questions about (a) decisions they may or may not have made, (b) how they arrived at those decisions, and (c) the degree to which they were committed to the directions implied in those decisions, his research resulted in a postulation of four identity statuses

or four ways young people in late adolescence might resolve Erikson's original dichotomous crisis "Identity-Identity Diffusion." The four statuses are labelled:

1. *Identity Achievement*. In this status, individuals "have undergone significant exploration and have made commitments in most interview areas;"
2. *Moratorium*. Here individuals are seen to be in an exploratory period. Their "commitments are not firm, but they are struggling actively . . . they may be said to be in an identity crisis;"
3. *Foreclosure*. In this status, individuals evince strong commitment, but have not arrived at the commitment "via the route of exploration; they have retained, virtually unquestioned, the values and occupational directions of their childhood;" and
4. *Identity Diffusion*. These individuals may "have undergone some tentative explorations, but this has actually been more like wandering than exploring . . . the hallmark of the diffusion identity status is a lack of commitment." (Marcia, 1994, p. 73)

While subtypes of the statuses have been identified, these four remain the foundation of this field of research, both clinical and scientific in nature. However, this framework for understanding identity development proved unsuited to my inquiry for two reasons. It describes four ways individuals attain identity, but identifies place. It situates individuals in different places in the developmental framework. While this is important and useful information, I wanted to explore students' subjective experience of their self-learning (about themselves as adults—workers, citizens, members of community and contributors to society) in the process of attaining their undergraduate degrees, and

secondly, the ways in which the experience of university education influences that self-learning. In my opinion, a much more open-ended, exploratory conversation was required. On the other hand, such a conceptual framework could be useful in developing, for example, intervention programs for students who might be considered at risk of dropping out. In fact, a remarkable number of studies have been carried out on post-secondary students in the last few decades.

While Erikson's and Marcia's work relates to late adolescence and young adulthood, early theories specific to post-secondary student development were based on studies of White, elite, college-aged males (Chickering, 1969; Perry, 1970), and have fallen into disrepute in recent decades. The reason, in part, was their inability to include the increased diversity of the university population and expanding sex and gender roles. Other developmental theorists (Arnett, 2000; Baxter-Magolda, 1992, 1999; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Hofer & Pintrich, 2002; King & Kitchener, 1994; Zhang & Watkins, 2001), however, have undertaken more recent research, addressing cognitive and psycho-social development. They have demonstrated some interesting patterns which show differences in culture, gender, and ways of knowing. The increased diversity of the student population in universities today requires an increased awareness and understanding of what the student brings to the learning endeavour.

Chickering's first book, *Education and Identity* (1969), was written with the intention of helping faculty understand the process of student development so that they could teach students more effectively. Chickering had no idea that his theories would be perceived as far more valuable by Student Services personnel than by the faculty of the

sixties, who questioned the purpose of studying broad-based development as irrelevant to the goals of information transfer and cultivation of the intellect in higher education (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In 1993, Chickering and Reisser revised earlier research in education and identity development to acknowledge a broadened commitment in higher education to the development of human talent and potential. They addressed issues of gender differences, sexual identity and cultural diversity. The authors acknowledged that development is not a smooth linear progression but “a process of infinite complexity” (1993, p. 35). They cautioned the reader that they are not espousing a single theory for every situation, student or school, but are committed to their broad approach to understanding the development of the whole student during the university years. They described seven “vectors” of development in students, but emphasized that certain developmental accomplishments are necessary as a foundation for other learning. The vectors are explained here as they interdependently contribute to the students’ developing sense of self. The term *vector* indicates direction of movement, implying process:

1. *Developing Competence*: This concept includes three kinds of competence within the Chickering and Reisser model: intellectual, physical and manual, including interpersonal skills. Intellectual competence includes some of the processes King and Kitchener (1994) described in their model of reflective judgment. Chickering and Reisser described building a repertoire of skills to comprehend, analyze, and synthesize. Developing competence entails developing new frames of reference that integrate more points of view and help the student to make sense, in more adequate ways, of their observations and experiences. Physical and manual skills are defined as those which might pertain to artistic or athletic achievement, but

could also include the dexterity of laboratory skills. Interpersonal competence refers to those skills involved in working cooperatively and communicating effectively. It includes developing the ability to understand another's point of view and choosing relationship strategies that foster a relationship or group functioning.

2. *Managing Emotions*: For many students new to university, the experience will bring with it changes and new experiences that generate a range of emotions from fear to anxiety, anger, depression, boredom and frustration, to name a few. Some of these have the capacity to undermine a student's best intentions, academic focus and, possibly, their entire academic experience, in which they are faced with challenges to learn, grow and change in many ways. Learning coping strategies, accessing emotions in a healthy and responsible way, and healing emotional wounds are just some of the developmental tasks students are coping with as they are learning to relate and think differently.
3. *Moving through Autonomy to Interdependence*: This process involves three components: (a) a downward shift in the need for continual expressions of reassurance, affection or approval from others; (b) developing the ability to carry on activities and solve problems in a self-directed (agentic) manner, the confidence to be mobile in order to pursue opportunity or adventure; and (c) an increase in one's awareness of one's place in and commitment to a larger community.
4. *Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships*: "Relationships are connections with others that have a profound impact on students' lives" (Chickering &

Reisser, 1993, p. 145). Learning how to express and manage feelings, how to resolve differences, reconsider assumptions, and make meaningful commitments are all part of this vector. Probably most important to this vector are two components: tolerance and capacity for intimacy. Tolerance implies tolerance of difference, allowing students to suspend judgement and understand something or someone unfamiliar. It involves the development of empathy. Given the increasing student diversity, this is an important vector for faculty to understand and develop. Capacity for intimacy concerns the quality of relationships with friends and partners. It is essential in learning about healthy relationships, how to understand boundaries and to distinguish between caring for and about someone and feeling beholden to them for approval or well being. This vector is closely associated with awareness of one's values.

5. *Establishing Identity*: At some level of generalization, all of the vectors contribute to identity development. With a strong emphasis on the process of development, this model describes establishing identity as the “growing awareness of competencies, emotions, and values, confidence in standing alone and bonding with others, moving beyond intolerance toward openness and self-esteem” (p. 173).

This is among the most important work that students accomplish during their university experience. It relates most directly to students' capacity for civic engagement and their career development and, if supported through intentional practice at the curricular and co-curricular levels, makes the difference between a students' perception

of a successful, meaningful university experience and one which involved “just putting in time.”

6. *Developing Purpose*: If development along the first five vectors contribute to the question “Who am I?” the sixth vector, developing purpose, relates to the development of the person’s ability to assess his interests and options, to work with a sense of intentionality, and to persist in the face of obstacles. This vector relates strongly to vocational development and the way the student assesses her interests and abilities and begins to think about the world of work. Thinking and doing require an ability to plan and execute, both inherent in this vector.
7. *Developing Integrity*: The final vector in the theory relates most strongly to an understanding of one’s personal values. Three interwoven aspects comprise what Chickering and Reisser call *humanizing values*: (a) shifting away from absolute beliefs, (b) learning to balance one’s own beliefs, and (c) self-interest with those around one.

*Personalizing values* reflect a process of becoming aware of one’s core values while tolerating and respecting those of others.

*Developing congruence* is the ability to match one’s internal beliefs with one’s external behaviour. This relates to increased awareness of social responsibility.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) closed their chapter on student identity development with a paragraph worth citing:

In earlier eras, the principal task of education was “socialization,” and the problem of individuals was to learn the attitudes, actions, and skills necessary for a satisfying and productive fit with “society.” The symphony had a clearly stated

theme and rhythm. The types and positions of the instruments were settled. To contribute, one had merely to choose a standard instrument, learn to play it, and practice the part. In the global society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where change is the only certainty, not socialization but *identity formation* becomes the central and continuing task of education. With a firm sense of self as artist—as performer, composer, improviser, and conductor—tomorrow’s graduates will not be bound to a single instrument. . . . Regardless of the roles they play, they [need to] know how to bring forth their best talents and contribute to the greater whole. (p. 208)

[Italics added]

Chickering and Reisser stated clearly that they believe that human development should be the organizing purpose for higher education. The rapidly changing climate of higher education today emphasizes universities’ response to demands for greater support for student learning and outcomes. This means that a developmentally centred snapshot of students’ experience, perceptions of their learning, and identity development will contribute to the development of curriculum that engages with real-world problems, while reflecting on key concepts, larger agendas, and personal meaning.

In my work with students over the past twenty years, no single theory of student development has seemed sufficient to describe the complex processes I have observed. Therefore, for the purposes of this inquiry, I adapted the concept of *identity development* using theoretical frameworks developed by Chickering (1969), Chickering and Reisser (1993), Baxter-Magolda (1999), and Baxter-Magolda and King (2004). Their frameworks stem from psychological developmental theorists including Belenky et al. (1986, 1997), Erikson (1968), Perry (1970, 1999), and Piaget (1959). It is important to acknowledge

that any study of identity or self is vast and complex and has been the subject of inquiry in many disciplines and academic careers. This inquiry does not attempt to include that vast body of literature but it situates itself within the area of study: the self-learning (narrative identity) of a group of traditionally aged (18-24 years) undergraduate students in a mid-sized western university, socially situated, culturally embedded, and academically engaged.

The movement toward a holistic approach in higher education is one in which Baxter-Magolda (1999, 2003) and Baxter-Magolda and King (2004) advocated a constructive developmental approach to pedagogy. They suggested that the “traditional separation of cognition and affect that manifests in students experiencing college as two separate worlds—the curricular and the co-curricular—works against achieving self-authorship” (Baxter-Magolda & King, 2004, p. 32).

Baxter-Magolda cited the American Association of Colleges and Universities’ (2002) document *Greater Expectations: A New Vision of Learning as a Nation Goes to College*, which advocated:

Intentional learners who consciously choose to act in ethical and responsible ways . . . able to place themselves in the context of a diverse world . . . draw on difference and commonality to produce a deeper experience of community. (p. 22)

These are qualities of citizenship which are nurtured, not through pedantic recitation of “truths,” but through principles such as those identified in the Learning Partnerships Model:

1. Validate learners’ capacity to know;
2. Situate learning in the learners’ experience; and

3. Construct meaning mutually. (Baxter-Magolda, 2004)

Along with these principles, Baxter-Magolda and King (2004) endorsed three assumptions in the learning model:

1. The *epistemological* dimension of development requires cognitive maturity, the ability to view knowledge as contextual, constructed using relevant evidence in a particular context. It recognizes multiple perspectives as legitimate and implies the capacity to participate in the construction, evaluation and interpretation of judgements, to analyze external claims critically, rather than adopt or reject them without reflection. Knowledge is complex and socially constructed.
2. People's ability to view themselves and construct their own identities based on their chosen values requires an internally generated sense of self, not overly dependent on the views of others, representing the *intrapersonal foundation* of self-authorship; self is central to knowledge construction.
3. People's view of themselves in relation to others and their construction of relationships reflects a capacity to engage in authentic, interdependent relationships with diverse others. This is the *interpersonal foundation* of self-authorship, characterized by respect for self and others' views, identities and cultures. In the learning setting, authority and expertise are shared (Baxter-Magolda & King, 2004).

These three assumptions have been the basis of the research design.

In this inquiry I have combined the theoretical frameworks of Chickering and Baxter-Magolda to outline a developmental path with two interwoven dimensions:

- *Epistemological*: Addressing students' beliefs about knowledge, how it is constructed, how to evaluate or judge its legitimacy.
- *Ontological*: Addressing the ways of being that evidence and are influenced by the epistemological beliefs.

In these interwoven dimensions, I used the categories *Intrapersonal* and *Interpersonal* to identify students' self-knowledge and their beliefs about and engagement in relationships and roles.

- *Intrapersonal*: Comprising individuals' values, their sense of identity in the context of their historical, social, and cultural (and/or spiritual) background.
- *Interpersonal*: Characterized by students' beliefs about and ability to participate in relationships and roles involving such qualities as responsibility, negotiation, and commitment.

Within this framework, Baxter-Magolda and King (2004) identified three phases of epistemological development. Although these are not intended to delineate discrete stages or imply linearity, they help to identify students' movement through the experiences they describe and the meanings they make of them. In this inquiry I have used Baxter-Magolda's phases as an indicator of epistemological development about self, values, course-based learning, and life and career trajectory:

- *External*: Knowledge is certain, one's sense of self is simplistic (components are uncoordinated and or unexamined) and requires others' approval. Efficacy is shaped by behaving in ways that gain others' approval; relationships with similar others are dependent in nature.

- *Transitional*: Awareness and acceptance of uncertainty is present; acknowledgement of multiple perspectives is evidenced in a shift from authority's knowledge to one's personal processes; awareness of one's values and identity is evolving. Tension may be apparent between emergent internal values and external pressures, usually prompting self-exploration. This includes examining one's relationships with significant others, one's goals and purpose (life and career), and one's social, cultural (and/or spiritual), and gendered selves. Increasing awareness of one's emotions is characterized by a focus on one's relationships, often the trigger for strong emotions.
- *Self-authorship and Contextual*: Knowledge is seen as contextual; an internal belief system is developed through constructing, evaluating and interpreting judgements in light of available evidence and frames of reference. One's own values are apparent through engagement in experiences and making choices. The self is experienced as familiar, stable and capable. Relationships are characterized by the capacity to engage in authentic, interdependent relations with diverse others, recognizing and negotiating one's relational needs, and the ability to understand and accept others' perspectives without being consumed by them (Baxter-Magolda & King, 2004).

### **Student Learning**

I have selected this sample of the literature on student learning based on its importance and relevance to this study of students' identity development. Mezirow (2000) suggested that needing to understand the meaning of our experience is a "defining condition" of being human (p. 3). If this is so, it is essential that adult learning (in

institutions of higher education) emphasize contextual understanding, critical reflection on assumptions, and validating meaning by assessing reasons. The contextual nature of understanding (a student's biography, history, culture, for example) Mezirow asserted, accounts for much of what one knows and believes; values and feelings (p. 3). One of the tasks of helping students develop their abilities as contextually aware thinkers, inquirers and problem-solvers, involves, in the words of a university teaching award winner, "meeting them where they are" (D. Berry, personal communication, September, 2005). To accomplish this, a professor needs to know or at least be curious about where that is.

Kitchener and King, in their work on the Reflective Judgment Model (1994, 2002), have devoted years to the study of how adolescents and adults assimilate problem-solving, particularly in complex or ill-defined problems, according to certain sets of assumptions or cognitive structures (which they call stages). Much of their work agrees with Piaget's guiding principle that individuals develop (in this case, their assumptions about knowledge develop) as they attempt to organize and adapt to their environment. One of the assumptions made by the authors is that "teaching students to think reflectively is an institutional goal," and one that is best met when "it is built into the whole curriculum—and co-curriculum—of the college" (p. 230).

Kitchener (1983) suggested that there are three levels of cognitive processing:

1. Computation, memorization and comprehension;
2. Meta-cognition, or thinking about their thinking; and
3. Epistemic cognition or the process an individual uses to monitor the epistemic nature of problems and the truth value of alternate solutions.

These developmentally progressive forms of reasoning account, she asserted, for different problem-solving strategies. Kitchener (1983), and King and Kitchener (1994) found in their research that epistemic cognition (or reflective thinking) tends to emerge in late adolescence but its form may change in the adult years. This form of thinking is often sacrificed if knowledge transmission or covering content is the focus of the teaching and learning interface.

### **Faculty Members and Scholarship**

Professors contribute more to students' academic learning than any other single group in the university. Identity development is intrinsically connected to epistemology and cognitive development, and faculty members have tremendous power to influence that development. The next sections address faculty members' theories of teaching and learning, organizational structure of the academy, and disciplinarity.

Ramsden (1992, 2002) addressed faculty members' developing theories of teaching and learning. His research involved extensive interviews of faculty combined with the study of students' approaches to learning identified in three hierarchically related theories:

1. Teaching as the transmission of knowledge;
2. Teaching as the organization of student activity; and
3. Teaching as the facilitation of learning.

Ramsden (2002) said that "ways of going about teaching are the outcome of a teacher's perceptions of the conditions defined by the concept of teaching" (pp.118-119).

What is interesting in the theories described above is that they share a distinct lack of concern with *who the students are*, who are engaging in the process of learning what is

taught. Ramsden does discuss student approaches to learning, but he does so from the perspective of approaches as strategies and beliefs—the how and what of student learning. What he neglects is the who and why of student learning. How and what are important because they give the professor clues as to the who, but without an underlying curiosity regarding the learners one is teaching and their context, the question will not get asked.

Asking oneself such questions is an essential aspect of much faculty development work in higher education. Faculty development involves creating opportunities for faculty to examine their views and assumptions about teaching. As Saroyan and Amundsen (2004) pointed out, such views left unexamined are likely to foster the kinds of teaching behaviours that are primarily didactic in nature and that foster the instructor's self-view as subject expert. Given that Kegan (1994) suggested that most professionals in their thirties are likely to be seeking exactly that self-view, it becomes even more essential to cultivate and reward an atmosphere of knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action (Schön, 1995).

Schön introduced the notion of reflection on professional practice in 1983 in *The Reflective Practitioner*. He built on this in subsequent work on reflection-in-action and called for a new epistemology in higher education, one which supports a scholarship of integration (1995). Schön was referring to the “radical separation of research and practice” which has existed in the modern research university since the early 1900s, when professional schools were introduced into institutions of higher learning. What Schön proposes is that we “turn the problem on its head” (p. 3) by asking not only how practitioners can apply the results of academic research, but also what kinds of knowing

are already embedded in competent practice. Katz and Henry (1993) examined this inquiry in their work on the challenge of assisting professors in becoming teachers. They use an analogy of the medical scientist, for whom “clinical” means not just applying theory in practice but the development of theory through practice (p. 6).

Most faculty members, if asked to describe their scholarship, would focus on their research, that body of knowledge which they seek to understand, explore, and write about in scholarly publications. Current efforts to expand the definition of faculty scholarship to include the study of one’s beliefs, theories and practices of teaching and learning in higher education are essential to the ability of higher education to meet the needs of its students and the society it serves (Richardson, 2001). While this study concerns itself with undergraduate students, the role of faculty development remains relevant in that students often identify with professors as significant sources of their self-learning (UVic Student Engagement focus groups, 2006).

Saroyan and Amundsen (2004) cited Schwab (1970) in their description of the necessary interactions among *student*, *teacher*, *subject matter* and *context* (p. 18) in their work examining the development of teaching and learning in higher education. The contextual factors affecting each of these “commonplaces” are listed as follows:

1. *What students bring to the educational experience*: for example, prior knowledge of the subject matter, conception of learning, expectations about responsibility for learning, and extent to which success in learning has been experienced (to this I would add students’ perceptions, values and beliefs, epistemological, cognitive, and psycho-social development).

2. *What the teacher brings to the educational experience*: for example, perspective on teaching and learning, prior experience of teaching in general and the course being taught, perspective on the role of the instructor.
3. *How the subject matter or discipline affects the educational experience*: for example, how the knowledge structures of the discipline influence the nature of the tasks that are engaged in by those in the discipline (Donald, 1986), and the type of learning that is required (often related to the level of the course).
4. *How the context or external factors influence the nature of the instruction*: for example, whether the course is required or not, size of the class, other responsibilities of the professor and students, institutional factors. (Saroyan & Amundsen, 2004, pp. 18-19)

Saroyan and Amundsen presented a model of teaching expertise that draws on four types of knowledge: (a) subject-matter knowledge, (b) pedagogical content knowledge, (c) knowledge of the learner, and (d) knowledge of the context. The dynamic relationship between the unobservable constructs (knowledge, perspectives, reflection) and observable actions (implementation of instructional decisions, evaluation of the impact of those decisions, and development of new knowledge about teaching) results in developing expertise when “there is alignment” (p. 22) between the observable and unobservable components.

Perspectives include values, conceptions and beliefs about higher education and teaching and learning in general. Saroyan and Amundsen (2004) acknowledged that this is relatively unexplored territory. Reflection functions, according to Saroyan and Amundsen, are the “glue” holding together knowledge, perspectives and actions (p. 25).

While the model proposed by Saroyan and Amundsen places student learning at its centre, the complexities of the system—the context—includes external factors such as institutional culture, reward structures, and teaching norms.

University faculty are vulnerable to increasing instability in the workplace, as are workers in other sectors of the labour market. They are challenged by concurrent expectations of more output (more hours taught, more students supervised, more research published, more administrative responsibility for research and grant management) in conditions of social instability. This instability often creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and heightened anxiety, not conducive to a thoughtful examination of one's philosophy of teaching and learning on a regular basis. In a longitudinal study of several British HEI's (institutions of higher education), Allen (2003) identified several interrelated issues affecting the climate of insecurity. Primarily, Allen suggested, levels of insecurity are affected by perceptions of the change-management process, complicated by individual or group perceptions of being respected (p. 84).

For the newly appointed faculty member, this makes the process of launching his or her academic career as tenuous and uncertain as it has ever been in history, complicated by shifting institutional values, greater demands for publication and funded research, along with the expectation of longer teaching hours.

### **Structure of the academy.**

The modern university, said Ford (2002), "is such a complex and contradictory entity, it is easy to misunderstand it" (p. 3). He goes on to suggest that, while it is easy to pick on one or another aspect of the system to study or criticize, it is easier still to make vague reference to its complexity and avoid any careful analysis. The university, although

it is a system that is committed to critical analysis and self-understanding, has a tendency not to reflect on itself and “tends to dismiss the reflections of others” (Ford, 2002, p. 3). The structure of universities has been described as changing very slowly over time, with models for academic structure spanning more than a millennium, many cultures and several continents (Pedersen, 1997). Others (Kerr, 2001) have described the “multiversity” as an “inconsistent institution,” not one community, but several. He describes the British influence of the undergraduate community, the German influence of the graduate and research communities, and the American influence of its commitment to the public at large, but also points to the necessary “confusion” of the whole “for the sake of the preservation of the whole uneasy balance” (p. 15).

It has been generally recognized in higher education that faculty hold primary allegiance to their disciplines (Becher, 1989). What this means in functional terms is that there can be tensions for a faculty member between what is happening in a department or program in their institution, and their career as judged by their disciplinary peers.

In Canada, our university models are known as having evolved from a blend of the British and German and, more recently, American research university traditions (Pocklington & Tupper, 2002). Within the last hundred years, most structural and administrative changes have been based on organizational development theory, a practice adopted from the business management paradigm. There has been, some scholars say (M’Gonigle & Starke, 2006, p. 12), a massive “higher education industry” develop “without anyone seeming to notice.” That social critics did not pay attention to this development for many years is intriguing, given its scale and influence. Perhaps higher education’s invisibility explains the fact that it is really only since the 1990s that rapid

change has begun to be felt within the academy. This is somewhat remarkable given the increased rate and complexity of change outside the system.

The environment inside this system, however, has become increasingly turbulent. As the rate and complexity of change speeds up socially, politically, environmentally, and economically, increases in complications and pressures within the academy also shift at an escalating rate (Allen, 2003). Some examples of this include the establishment of increasing numbers of externally funded and regulated research centres, changes to faculty framework agreements, and increasing corporate sponsorship of research which intensifies political conflicts as government support for traditional forms of research diminishes (Jarvis, 2001).

There is also increasing evidence of the need to connect research, students, and student learning to the world outside the university (Klein, 2005), and increasing evidence of efforts made to devise strategies to engage faculty and students in examining their knowledge and beliefs about topics such as responsibility to community (M’Gonigle & Starke, 2006), internationalization, compassion, and global justice (Kahane, 2009; Van Gyn, Schuerholz-Lehr, Caws, & Preece, 2009). Conflict and tensions among these various communities are part of the competition for power within and prestige without the academy today.

### *Trans-disciplinarity.*

This section introduces the concept of trans-disciplinarity as a vehicle for engaging faculty and students in that examination process. To situate the concept clearly, I begin with descriptions of various kinds of disciplinary inquiry.

*Mono-disciplinarity* (McGregor, 2004) refers to practice and research stemming from one discipline. *Multi-disciplinary inquiry* involves one discipline inviting others to assist in solving complicated societal problems, but the intent is to serve the root or initiating discipline. Inquiry that uses *interdisciplinary approaches* will transfer the methods of one discipline to another to generate new analyses or applications of knowledge. At times, new disciplines have emerged (such as microbiology). However, some scholars suggest that interdisciplinary work does not address the whole, the attempt to understand the present world in all its complexities (Nicolescu, 1998). Within the forms of inquiry favoured at the borders of disciplines, theoretical frameworks evolve to guide the problem-solving efforts. These forms of inquiry (which are termed trans-disciplinary) and the theoretical frameworks that inform them are heterogeneous; that is, they draw on a wide array of disciplinary knowledge. As Gibbons et al. (1994) stated, trans-disciplinary inquiry is reflexive; it reflects on the values implied in human aspirations and projects. It acknowledges a social accountability, a need to address concerns about environmental, economic, health, and community issues that are affecting us at a global level.

What has been historically preserved as *truth* in Western institutions of higher education has been re-examined since post-modernity as one lens, one set of views, and open to interpretation. The massive amounts of specialized knowledge preserved in disciplinary thought have historically served to restrict research within the confines of the discipline. As a result, tremendous strides have been made in knowledge in these areas, but the value of trans-disciplinary inquiry remains relatively unexplored at many universities. As Gibbons et al. (1994) asserted, world problems do not occur within

disciplinary frameworks and it is likely that trans-disciplinary, non-hierarchical and heterogeneously organized forms of inquiry, production, and distribution or translation of knowledge will become more common. There will be an increasing need for scientists, policy makers, technological experts and managers of people to have the capacity to work in diverse, complex and fluid groups.

Nicolescu (1998) described the need for bridges between the disciplines in his call for the transdisciplinary evolution of the university. Trans-disciplinarity implies that which is “at once *between* the disciplines, *across* the different disciplines, and *beyond* all discipline” (Nicolescu). Trans-disciplinary inquiry is a way of self-transformation oriented towards the knowledge of the self, the unity of knowledge, and the creation (*emergence*) of a new art of living which has as its goal the sustainability of life on this planet. While acknowledging the enormous diversity of the systems of education from one country to another, Nicolescu called for a *common centre of questioning*, and suggested that trans-disciplinary inquiry could make a powerful contribution to the type of education described in a UNESCO commission chaired by Delors (*Learning: The Treasure Within*, 1996). This call does not diminish the necessity of disciplinary knowledge but requires flexibility of thought. Lattanzi (1998) suggested such roles could be named *intellectual innerspace* (where disciplinary knowledge is developed and new disciplines might emerge) and *intellectual outerspace* (a space where credible knowledge can be integrated into a new “whole” in which new insights can emerge).

Delors’ (1996) report called for four pillars of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The first of these pillars is *learning to know*, which relates to training in distinguishing what Nicolescu (1998) described as “what is real from what is illusory” (p. 4). The scientific

spirit, which is not found in the accumulation of masses of scientific knowledge, refers to leading the student “into the very heart of the scientific approach” (p. 4). Here a trans-disciplinary approach would not supplant disciplinary approaches, but rather complement them because:

It will mean the *emergence* of continually connected beings, who are able to adapt themselves to the changing exigencies of professional life, and who are endowed with a permanent flexibility which is always oriented towards the actualization of their interior possibilities. (Nicolescu, 1998, p. 5)

The second pillar of education as described by Delors, *learning to do*, encompasses the world of work, and the acquisition of the necessary learning and skills to work in the tumultuous world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nicolescu spoke of the danger of any person becoming frozen in one occupation, overspecialized and therefore vulnerable to unemployment, exclusion and debilitating alienation. He saw a trans-disciplinary approach to education as invaluable because *learning to do* is, in a trans-disciplinary definition, an apprenticeship in *creativity*, one of the employability skills called for by businesses and governments worldwide (Zernike, 2010).

The third pillar, *learning to live together*, implies more than tolerating others’ differences, to include learning trans-cultural, trans-religious, trans-political, and trans-national attitudes, guided by recognition of our growing interdependence and a common analysis of the risks and challenges of the future. Nicolescu stated, “Just as in all other areas of Nature and knowledge, open unity and complex plurality are not antagonists” (1998, p. 6).

The last of the pillars, *learning to be*, implies a permanent apprenticeship or a mutuality of learning in which teachers inform students as much as students inform the teachers, in a constant striving for greater self-knowledge. This points to the trans-disciplinary constitution of human beings as the bridge among the pillars. Nicolescu (1998) stated that a sustainable education must be an integral education of the human being and must not privilege the intellect over sensibility and the body. While that privilege might have been necessary in the previous era to permit the explosion of knowledge that we currently enjoy, it is time to instil complex and transdisciplinary thought into the structures and programs of higher education, to continue its evolution toward its mission (sometimes forgotten) of the study of the universal. Delors (1996) went further to admonish universities to “transcend what is wrongly held to be the conflict between the logic of public service and the logic of the job market” (p. 26).

Van Manen (2001) called trans-disciplinarity a new mode of knowledge production, describing it as applied or practice-oriented, and transcending the boundaries of traditional disciplines and paradigms. In terms of research methods, van Manen noted qualitative methods and approaches that have moved far beyond discipline-based methodologies in his description of the emergence of transcendent knowledge modes and problem-based practices, particularly in the human science epistemologies.

### **Global Context: What the World Needs Now**

The last few decades have seen tremendous change in the governments, borders, climates and environmental issues, economies, and the socio-cultural relations of many countries. While “civilized” nations have denied the possibility of another global atrocity based on religious or cultural difference such as the murder of millions of Jewish citizens

of Europe during the Second World War, in fact millions have died since in genocidal conflicts in Croatia, Rwanda, Sudan and the Middle East. This does not include those millions who have died as a result of starvation, drought, disease, and conflicts of religion, culture, or political ideology. Increased global trade has resulted in a growing economic gap between those countries that can participate in the global knowledge economy and those that are trapped in poverty with limited natural resources and decaying infrastructure. Increased travel brings products, people, cultures, and sometimes the threat of pandemics with more frequency. With this increased contact also come new ideas, renewed interest in understanding ancient traditions, and urgent questions of how to offer solutions to some of the world's intractable problems while maintaining economic stability (Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004).

In environmental terms, we have lived beyond our means (United Nations, 2005) for some time. Increasing numbers of academics are researching the environment, human-environment interactions, climate change, sustainability, and more; however, there remains a gap between what we learn for tomorrow and what should be done today (M'Gonigle & Starke, 2006). Some authors point to the essential role that universities must play, changing themselves as they contribute to changing our world (M'Gonigle & Starke, 2006).

University faculty are positioned to study and research some of these complex and intractable problems affecting humanity and our environment. How they engage with such issues has a strong relationship to how their students learn from what they teach. Moreover, their thinking about how their students learn has implications for how they engage students in thinking about the ways their disciplinary learning contributes to the

world and their participation in it. For many faculty members, separating their research activity from their teaching load would reflect a tacit belief that undergraduate students are somehow not knowledgeable enough to understand.

### **Constructivism(s).**

I have developed this inquiry using constructivist principles. This section briefly describes some distinctions among the labels and definitions of constructivism(s) I encountered.

As early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., Greek skeptics believed that it is logically impossible to establish the “truth” of any particular piece of knowledge (von Glasersfeld, 1995). Constructivist theory holds that reality is mediated through human acts of knowing and that knowledge is temporary, developmental, and socially and culturally mediated (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). Radical constructivism challenges the Platonic concept of knowledge and knowing, suggesting that we abandon the requirement that knowledge represents an independent reality. Instead we should explore what humans can do in the experiential world, how we deal with physical objects and how we think with abstract concepts. Knowledge is regarded as being constructed by the individual, such that meaning is created *of* the world, rather than discovered *from* the world (Gale, 1995, p. xii). Knowing, therefore, becomes an adaptive process. Well described by Piaget (1985) and Piaget, Jean-Blaise, Szeminska, and Bang (1977) in their work on cognitive development in children, constructivist theories have evolved into a major foundation of the education reform movement in the United States since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (von Glaserfeld, 1995). While not strictly a pedagogical theory, constructivist theory is widely associated with pedagogy because of its emphasis on learning through experience.

*Developmental-constructivism* (also referred to as constructive-developmentalism) has provided a framework for assessing higher educational objectives such as (a) the development of understanding how knowledge is constructed, (b) the ability to take perspective on one's beliefs, and (c) the realization that learning and development are worthy lifelong goals (Taylor & Marienau, 1997). Developmental-constructivist pedagogy values how students make meaning from their academic learning, and how that meaning-making informs students' experience of their own identity development (Baxter-Magolda & King, 2004). Developmental constructivist pedagogy (Baxter-Magolda, 1999) holds that epistemic assumptions evolve via developmental structures. Based on Kegan's (1982, 1994) work on "the orders of the mind," some developmental-constructivist pedagogies examine *how* students make meaning of their thinking, feeling, and social relating, rather than on the content of the meaning-making process. Kegan described the core organizing principles of the meaning-making process as the subject-object relationship. *Object* is defined as "those elements of our knowing or organizing that we can reflect on, handle, look at, be responsible for, relate to each other (Kegan, 1994, p. 32). *Subject*, in contrast, is defined as "those elements of our knowing and organizing that we are identified with, tied to, fused with, or embedded in" (p. 32).

### **Career Development Theory and Systems Theory.**

One of the theoretical challenges of examining students' development of their self-knowledge relative to their life-career goals is that career-development theory is generally acknowledged to be in its infancy (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006). First introduced in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century by Ginzberg, Axelrod and Herma (1951), more recent

definitions of career development include “the total constellation of psychological, sociological, educational, physical, economic and chance factors that combine to shape the career of an individual over the life span” (Sears, 1982) or more generally still “a person's course or progress through life” (Oxford English Dictionary Online, 2009). Savickas (1996) examined convergence in career-development theory, albeit in the midst of continuing debate.

Some of the trends in career-development theories include a trend toward developmental process and content whereby there is a focus on the individual (Collin, 1996; Super, 1980; Walsh & Holland, 1992; Wolfe & Kolb, 1980) and an increased acknowledgement of the context in which the individual operates (Gottfredson, 1996; Krumboltz, Mitchell, & Jones, 1976). Savickas (2001) is credited with advancing the role of narrative theory in vocational counselling as the “lack of certainty and the corresponding instability in personal and social lives in contemporary times place greater stress on the need to develop meaningful life narratives” (Richardson, Constantine, & Washburn, 2005, p. 65). Further, the understanding of narrative as positioning the author and narrator in relation to significant others is based on the relational space between self and other, and uses Josselson’s (1992) typology of relational space to examine the role of relationships in career development.

The content and process of career-development theory from a systems-theory perspective are essential to an inquiry into students’ meaning-making of their academic experiences in higher education as they prepare to enter the world beyond education. The principles of interconnectedness, relatedness, and holism are integral to a systems approach to life and career planning (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2006; Bloch, 2005). In

their work on career development and systems theory, Patton and McMahon (1999, 2006) address the influences in the framework. These content influences include gender, age, self-concept, health, ability, disability, physical attributes, beliefs, personality, interests, values, aptitudes, skills, world of work knowledge, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. Bloch (2005) uses chaos and complexity theories to describe careers as complex adaptive entities and shows the historical development of career theory as falsely predicting control and certainty. Because most humans “experience unexplained trajectories and apparent, but not actual disconnections” (p. 198), Bloch suggested that we have not learned from this before because most people keep the real stories of their careers secret, believing them anomalies or just luck.

This study seeks to understand the patterns of some of those trajectories for student learners as they approach the transition from school to work.

### **Philosophical Considerations of a Methodology**

This chapter closes with a brief exploration of the philosophical shift away from a claim that any form of research can lead to absolute certainty, and its significance to the field of human science research. Polkinghorne (1983) described the result of this shift:

The dissolution of the consensus that science produces certain knowledge has required a change in methodological understanding. No longer can a researcher assume the consensus as a given and merely apply the rules and recipes which have been preciously formulated to guarantee certainty. When the guarantee that following a particular method will lead to truth is removed, a search for a way to decide among fallible alternative results is needed. (p. 243)

The move away from Cartesian dualism in philosophical traditions emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Fjelland & Gjengedal, 1994). Husserl (in Polkinghorne, 1983) argued that the dominating philosophical tradition of “methodical doubt” to prove objective existence stemmed from the hidden premises of mathematical natural science. He stated that, using those premises resulted in only that which could be described mathematically being seen as having an objective existence. “Phenomenology is the science of the essential structures of consciousness. It is a study based on the intuitive grasping of the essences of phenomena; it is not a study based on empirical generalization” (Polkinghorne, 1983; pp. 41-42). While Husserl is considered the father of the phenomenological movement (Polkinghorne, 1983), Heidegger’s subject was ontology or the understanding of Being. His work is associated with temporality and Being in place (*Dasein*), which manifest in linguistic forms (narrative). Polkinghorne (1988) described narrative as a primary scheme “through which life events are conjoined into coherent, meaningful, unified themes” (p. 126). These include short time-span events but also “developmental changes [such as] the move from childhood into adulthood” (Polkinghorne).

Polkinghorne (1988) identified a number of problems inherent in the study of meaning. He described the realm of meaning as a process, an activity, and thus not readily measured by an “impersonal” instrument. Moreover, the activity of meaning-making is not static. It changes and evolves, further complicating the process of its understanding. He also stated that the study of the realm of meaning requires the use of language. Language as a signifier of meaning has been a contested site in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Barthes, 1967; Lyotard, 1984; Wittgenstein, 1980). Where structuralists

such as de Saussure (1961) and Piaget (Piaget & Inhelder, 1959) examined underlying structures in language and culture to understand and interpret texts and cognition, later scholars began to point out the cultural boundedness of that study itself, and examine how knowledge itself is produced (Lyotard, 1984).

Wittgenstein is credited with articulating an approach to understanding language as the “ground of knowledge” (Mourad, 1997, p. 28), but Lyotard (1984), building on that work, is credited with the argument that all human communication constitutes different “language games.” His observations of science, truth claims and “legitimation” (p. 8), though still contested, indicated the sea-change that Kuhn (1962) called a scientific revolution or paradigm shift. Rorty (1979, 1998), another post-modern philosopher who decries the meta-narratives of the modern era, is more interested in what is pragmatic, especially in the Deweyian sense (Mourad, 1997). Mourad (1997) claimed that Rorty borrowed from the Gadamerian notion of *Bildung* or “self-formation” (p. 39) to suggest that education is the process of remaking (edifying) oneself. This edification is achieved through engagement in a hermeneutic process, using ideas, reading, research, talking, and writing, to create what he calls “abnormal conversations” (p. 40). I wonder if what Rorty (1979) described as “abnormal” might also be seen as *emergent* because he described “edifying discourse” as “tak[ing] us out of our old selves by the power of strangeness, to aid us in becoming new beings” (p. 360).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has described the conceptual framework of the project by discussing systems theory and the concept of emergence. Next, the role of context (global and institutional) was discussed in order to situate theories of learning and development,

pedagogy and student development theories. Subsequently, career-development theories and systems approaches to vocational theory were introduced and, finally, philosophical considerations of methodology were discussed. The next chapter will introduce and describe the methodology, rigour, and the researcher's role. The participants in the research project will be introduced.

### **Chapter 3. Methodology**

*We are all storytellers, and we are the stories we tell.*  
(McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006)

#### **Introduction**

This chapter describes the theoretical assumptions and perspectives of the qualitative research orientation adopted for this study. The narrative research will be described, including purpose and scope, sampling and recruitment, participants, and the instruments used. Next, ethics will be discussed, including the researcher role, reflexivity, and ensuring validity, trustworthiness, and the audit trail.

#### **Qualitative Research in Educational Settings**

Qualitative research seeks, among other things, to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of the individual who lives it, in a naturalistic approach to inquiry (Cresswell, 2003; Patton, 1990). Within educational research, qualitative methods are frequently used to assess how well something is done or to explore the meaning that people hold about educational issues (Cresswell, 2003; LeComte, Millroy, & Preissle, 1992; Patton, 1990). Holstein and Gubrium (2000) described the interpretive practice of qualitative research as institutionally embedded, acknowledging the social constructions of the recognizable (educational) contexts. Howe and Eisenhart (1990) described the importance of general standards for qualitative research in education. They discussed (a) educational issues, (b) a fit between research questions, and (c) data collection and analysis techniques that give “careful attention to the value their research questions have for informing educational practice, whether it be at the level of pedagogy, policy or social theory” (p. 7). Bruner (1990) emphasized the importance of culture as an aspect of

psychological inquiry: “It is man’s participation *in* culture and the realization of his mental powers *through* culture that make it impossible to construct a human psychology on the basis of the individual alone” (p. 12). Cresswell (2003) identified a theme in qualitative research that recognizes the role of research in advocating for change and bettering the lives of individuals, in this case students nearing graduation from their undergraduate studies.

Cresswell (2005) posited six characteristics of the qualitative research process.

*Qualitative research:*

1. Seeks to create a detailed understanding of a complex central phenomenon, is exploratory in nature and seeks to increase understanding;
2. Explores the literature to assist in the justification of the research problem;
3. Has a broad, general purpose, and seeks to understand the participants’ experiences;
4. Employs emergent design to allow for questions to be generated by participant responses; uses primarily word (text) or image data; collects information from a small number of individuals; uses natural settings where participants live, work, or study;
5. Uses inductive analysis of participants’ words and meanings to develop emergent descriptions and themes as well as their interrelations. Patton (1990) stated that “the strategy of inductive design is to allow the important analysis dimensions to emerge . . . without presupposing what the diagnosis will be” (p. 44); and
6. Views the researcher as an instrument and, as such, the data are filtered through the researcher with a concomitant, acknowledged set of delineated personal

biases, requiring reflexive consideration of researcher biases, values and assumptions.

### **Methodological Approach: Narrative**

I chose to conduct this study as a narrative inquiry because it concerns meaning-making, individual perspectives and how they align or diverge from others. Narrative inquiry engages participants' personal experiences, their interpretation of these experiences, and their integration of them into the storied fabric of their lives as university students nearing completion of their undergraduate studies.

McAdams et al. (2006) referred to Erikson's theory of psycho-social development when he said that adolescents and young adults in modern societies are challenged to formulate meaningful answers to the twin identity questions: *Who am I?* and *How do I fit into the adult world?* By engagement with and through resources and experiences in their culture (Barresi, 2006), most people acquire and transform their identity. These complex and evolving identity stories function, according to Erikson (1968), to provide some measure of unity and purpose in people's lives. McAdams (1997) suggested that internalized and evolving life stories (narrative identities) function to organize and make more coherent a life that could otherwise feel fragmented and diffuse.

As one of its inherent purposes, narrative inquiry enhances personal and social growth (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Identity has been described as "the story we live by" (McAdams et al., 2006) and is personally and socially shaped in the landscapes of our experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996). As we organize our stories

chronologically, we are actively constructing, telling and retelling, shaping and reshaping our narratives. Seeking to understand why people work and live in the ways that they do, a number of researchers (Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Josselson & Lieblich, 1993, 1999; McAdams et al., 2006, Riessman, 1993; Sarbin, 1986) have turned to narrative as a set of research strategies “that can work with the narratives people use to understand the human world” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. xi). These research practices span the collection and analysis of autobiographies and biographies, life writing, personal accounts, personal narratives, personal and life documents, oral history, ethnobiographies, narrative interviews, and more. Narrative theory is transdisciplinary. It is used in disciplines ranging from history and literary theory to psychology, sociology, social work, and anthropology (Casey, 1995/6). It can be applied to assist in understanding a range of problems relating to the practice “of the human disciplines” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 125).

### **Purpose and Scope of the Study**

This study is based on a conviction that our current system of higher education has, in the words of Tompkins (1996) “relinquished responsibility for envisioning life as a whole. It has become an umbrella organization where a variety of activities go on, but one that has no center and no soul” (p. 222). The inquiry comprises an investigation into students’ experience of their self-learning (that is, learning about self) in the context of their academic experience which, for the purposes of this paper, I am calling “identity development.” The inquiry examines what students say as having contributed to their identity or sense of self (meaningful learning) and its role in their school-to-work or post-undergraduate transition. The study occurs at the point where students are nearing

completion of their undergraduate degree, preparing to leave post-secondary education, applying to graduate or professional programs, or beginning their transition to the world of work and career.

### **Sampling and Participants**

This study involved a “purposeful” sample of “more than ten and fewer than twenty” “traditional-aged” (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) university students at or near completion of their undergraduate program at the University of Victoria.

The criteria were as follows:

1. Age (between twenty and twenty-four);
2. Study (in the last year of undergraduate studies); and
3. Had not previously worked with me as a counsellor.

Cresswell (2005) described *purposeful sampling* as the intentional selection of individuals and sites in order to learn or understand the central phenomenon. He described *theory or concept sampling* as a purposeful sampling strategy in which the researcher samples individuals or sites because they help the researcher to generate or discover a theory or certain concepts within a theory.

My intent was to explore the role or contribution of curriculum to students’ identity development and their perception of their “self-learning” in that experience. Participants were sought based on their nearness to degree completion and their relative lack of previous career-related work experience, as predicted by the age restrictions (from twenty to twenty-four as they approached graduation). The timing of the interviews aimed to capitalize on the approaching transition as a catalyst to personal reflection, particularly regarding their experience of learning in higher education and its contribution

to their life beyond university. The age limit of the participants was intended to concentrate the study on that group of students who proceeded more or less straight from high school to university with less than a year's break in their studies.

The participants in this study are, for me, the most important component. They brought to life my research questions and validated my curiosity. The following is a chart listing the demographic information of the twelve participants in the study.

**Table 1. Participant Demographics**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Born/Raised</b>	<b>Ethnicity/ Cultural Background</b>	<b>Family</b>	<b>Parents' Education/ Work</b>
Sharon	Small town BC/Victoria	Caucasian Canadian	father and mother, two younger sisters	F- post graduate science/college professor M-post graduate science/physiotherapist, self-employed
Jerry	Victoria/small v.i. communities,	Caucasian Canadian	Father and mother, one younger brother	F- high school/self- employed mortgage broker M-high school/bank worker→homemaker
Heidi	Small town, Alberta/ Ontario/ Lower mainland BC	Caucasian Canadian	Father and mother, younger brother and sister	F-high school/senior administrator, federal prison system M-undergraduate/ homemaker→teacher
Pami	Southeast Asia/Middle East/ /Victoria	South Asian	Father and mother, one younger sister	F-college?/ Govt, international M-Govt work→ homemaker
Jonathon	Small town, northern BC	Caucasian Canadian	Father and mother, significantly older half siblings not at home	F-undergraduate/ teacher→self- employed M- undergraduate/ teacher→
Julia	Victoria	Caucasian Canadian (first	Father and mother, older sister	F-undergraduate professional/ Chiropractor

		generation Canadian)		M-undergraduate/ public health
Anita	Small town, BC	Indo-Canadian (first generation)	Father and mother, older sister	F-grade 10/mill worker, taxi/truck driver M-undergraduate/family store
Nansi	Small town, northern BC	Indo-Canadian (first generation)	Father and mother, one older brother	F-undergraduate (India)/mill worker M-grade 10/restaurant worker
Katie	Lower mainland communities, BC	Caucasian Canadian	Parents divorced, one older and one younger brother	F-high school/ M-grade 7/hairdresser
David	Victoria	Asian-Canadian (first generation)	Father and mother, one younger sister	F- college /engineering tech M-high school/bank
Rosa	Victoria	Indo-Canadian (first generation)	Father and mother, only child	F-post graduate Math/ M-high school (India)
Kenzie	Small town, Alta	Caucasian Canadian	Father and mother, one younger brother	F-post graduate/self-employed M-post graduate/self-employed

### Recruitment Strategies

A number of different recruitment strategies were used over the course of several months. In the first weeks after receiving Human Research Ethics Board approval, I contacted deans of the faculties of Humanities, Sciences and Social Sciences to request permission to contact faculty teaching fourth-year classes. These three faculties were not deemed necessary by virtue of their discipline but because they are the largest faculties in the institution (UVic Institutional Analysis, 2006/7 Enrolment Reports) and, historically,

associated with the broadest curricular spread. Moreover, these faculties are often inaccurately targeted for criticism (by vocationally oriented students and parents) as having the fewest “jobs” associated with the undergraduate degrees they grant.

I asked faculty members who responded to my email for permission to come into the last ten minutes of a class, describe the research project, and leave contact information with students, while the faculty member was out of the room. Copies of the script of my description and invitation were available to faculty members on request, and a letter of introduction from my supervisor was also available (see Appendices A and B).

In addition, posters were created and posted in all academic buildings, including the library (Appendix C). As the term progressed, posters were also distributed to Student Services departments (the Student Transition Centre, Career Services, the Resource Centre for Students with a Disability, and the Peer Helping Office). A poster display was located at the Student Leadership Conference and the annual Career Fair.

No advertising occurred in Counselling Services to ensure that students attending the service perceived no pressure to participate and to minimize the possibility of dual relationships. The other criterion specified in all posters was that prospective participants could not have previously worked with me as a counsellor.

Prospective participants were invited to contact me by phone or email. All prospective participants who met the criteria were emailed a letter of informed consent (see Appendix D). After reading that document and indicating their willingness to proceed, the prospective participants were scheduled for a first interview.

## **Interviews**

Each participant took part in two 90-minute, semi-structured interviews. The first conversation tended to cover the first eight to twelve questions; it varied depending on the conversational style of the participant. A break of approximately seven to ten days was scheduled to allow for time to transcribe the interviews and create the participant's story.

The conversations began by briefly going over a printed copy of the letter of informed consent. I explained my interest in the topic and asked them if they had any particular goals or hopes about their participation. I reminded each participant that they could stop the recording at any time if they wanted some information not to be recorded and that they could withdraw consent for participation at any point, without penalty. I told participants they would receive the \$10 honorarium whether or not they changed their minds about participation. I then invited the participants to describe the experiences and places in which they lived and learned prior to coming to the university, and describe the expectations they brought with them as new students. A large portion of the first interview focused on participants' family of origin (what it was like to grow up in their family), including communities, significant experiences and family values they could identify. Participants then spoke of their experiences coming to UVic, in and outside the classroom, the disciplinary learning, faculty contact, and friends and relationships they found most useful, most challenging and the most contributory to their development of self-knowledge. The open-ended, semi-structured interviews allowed me to probe participants' descriptions of how they saw self-knowledge influencing their school-to-work transition, life and career goals, and community participation.

The conversations took place in a counselling office located in Student Services on the university campus. The location for the interviews was carefully chosen. One important consideration of narrative inquiry is the relationship between the “humans involved” but also includes “who the researcher is” (Clandinin, 2007). My role in and outside of the interviews was an essential part of the context and a necessary part of my history and worldview, mentioned periodically in the conversations. While wanting to avoid confusion for the participants about the nature and intent of the conversations, it was evident that the confidentiality, security, and comfort of the space, as well as its availability, made it a naturally private and relaxing place to talk. I was always aware that these conversations were not therapeutic but curious research conversations.

In order to reinforce the distinction between the research conversation and a counselling conversation, the reception staff were coached on how to communicate with participants and to welcome them as separate from clients. They were coached to greet the students as being “here for Janet’s research project,” and invited participants “to make themselves comfortable” while the staff member came to find me. While the differences were subtle, it was important that the support staff were aware of the difference between a student client and a research participant.

### **The Interview Guide**

I created an Interview Guide, consisting of an introduction and 24 open-ended questions. This provided an opportunity to explore particular experiences while still probing core questions (see Appendix G). The guide was created from a collection of questions drawn from narrative and identity interview-based research that I had gathered over a period of several years. A few of the questions came from Chickering and

Reisser's (1993) study of student identity development and Katz and Henry's (1993) study of faculty development and student learning. Several questions were adapted from Josselson's (1987) study of women's identity development. Some of the questions relating to family, values, and career, came from the years of personal and career counselling conversations I have had with students for the last twenty years.

The question path contributed to considerable reflexive questioning during the interviews. The flow worked so well that I found only one question in the series of 24 compound questions that did not fit the natural course of the conversations. Ironically, this experience was disconcerting because I had imagined that I would need to revise the question path as the study proceeded. While questions within questions emerged as each conversation proceeded, I found I worried about whether or not I was missing something.

The following entry was made after my third interview:

I'm so pleased with my question path! While each interview has been unique, the general flow of questions seems to move along naturally, with me often saying "I was just going to ask you about that" with a margin note added a few days later: "Oh dear, is this not 'reflexive' enough?"

#### **Piloting the guide.**

I piloted the Interview Guide with two students, one of whom had a position as a work-study student in Counselling Services, and the other who had been in an in-class presentation and volunteered to participate. When I checked our counselling historical data as part of the selection protocol, I discovered she had had a single counselling session with me some years before. Ironically, neither she nor I remembered the conversation or having met one another. This student expressed some distress when told

her data could not be used, but she agreed to complete the interviews anyway. The interviews went smoothly and the flow and range of conversation seemed coherent with my research questions. However, piloting the guide presented me with a research challenge I had not anticipated. After the first interview, the work-study student asked if she could carry on as a regular participant as she had enjoyed and learned so much in our first conversation. While flattering, this created a dilemma. I needed “more than ten and fewer than twenty participants” as part of my proposed research criteria. I was introduced to the researcher’s quandary of wanting and needing appropriate participants, while turning away two people who met my criteria but presented complications. By reflecting on the basis of the criteria I had imposed, in the instance of the student whom I had seen once several years earlier, the goal had been to avoid the blurring of dual relationships, where prior knowledge and investment in relationship might influence the conversation. In the second instance, with the work-study student, I had had very little prior contact with her, no responsibility for her work duties and, again, no prior knowledge of her student experience. After considerable reflection, writing, and discussion with my supervisor, both students were ultimately counted as full participants and their data are included.

### **Perception checking.**

During the interviews, I used a number of methods to encourage elaboration and to check my perceptions. (A list of these prompts can be seen in Appendix H.) I also used tentative paraphrasing as a conversational form of clarifying or checking my understanding. This conversational pattern may well be the result of a 20-year counselling career and as such may invite participants to agree with the researcher.

However I was aware of this and was very cautious in making interpretations. There were instances when I missed something or when the participant thought I was implying something s/he did not mean. The following three examples of disconfirmation serve as evidence of participants' willingness to correct or disagree with a misinterpretation or misunderstanding of what they were trying to express.

In the first example, Jerry and I were discussing how he developed his strong sense of individualism:

Janet: So when you talk about these two incidents, they both seem to have a really strong meaning of, "I work hard and am penalized for it."

Jerry: I wouldn't say it's so much that I'm penalized for it as much as I don't like being penalized for it. I don't know if that's any clearer, but it's...

Janet: So it's the piece about your resentment?

Jerry: I would say what it is, is it's, it's, the problem that I have with the way you're phrasing it is that it suggests a sort of chip on the shoulder sort of attitude and with me, it's just I think what's formative about it is that I tend to be a kind of a political person and, to be honest, the teachers had me in their pocket. I could have been the most raving lunatic person that ever walked the face of the university but instead we had these sorts of projects where the teachers were unable to justify why, for example, others were getting credit for my work; so immediately it sort of destroyed any sort of good will I had towards working for the good of the collectivity or anything like that.

In the second example, Jonathon and I were discussing his process of choosing his major:

Janet: Did you ever consider anything else?

Jonathon: I was going to do a history minor. I really like history. It's really concrete. The one thing that bugs me about English now is the point that it doesn't seem to matter what the character motivation is. I understand the values that I take out of pulling apart literature now is just the exercise of looking for meaning rather than what it actually means. I like poetry as a source of pleasure.

Janet: It's almost like the analytical piece grabs you more.

Jonathon: I think probably the reverse. I think I just got discouraged writing close readings on pieces and thinking that I found something and that just not being the case according to the person who marked the paper. Maybe I'm not getting it, not having the eye for it, not necessarily wanting to find the meanings.

The third example is the beginning of my second interview with Sharon. She had a strong reaction to the story and the first part of our conversation is addressing her feelings and what was missing:

Sharon: Because those were just examples that I thought related to the question you were asking me, but they didn't really form who I was. Whereas, because you don't know me as well you pull on those more and say this makes Sharon this way. But that's just a really, really small piece of it.

Janet: I was just looking at a particular slice. You felt like there was so much more.

Sharon: It was quite accurate at times. But my initial reaction was, I actually started to throw in stuff on my own. I'd like to write that in there as well . . . I'm thinking about what exactly I would have changed. I was really critical of myself when I

read this. As though, that's all I've done. That was one of my reactions. I thought, God, my life is so boring.

Janet: And yet...?

Sharon: And yet, I have never stopped. I have gone to university as soon as I was done school. I travelled all over Europe, I studied and travelled and lived in Hong Kong. I've been to Australia three times. I've done so much. I think what I really pull out of it and why I'm glad I did it, is I want to take my strong background now, my really strong upbringing, and bring it forward to help other people because I think that's the most rewarding to me. What I liked the most is tutoring those two children, ages 10 and 12, and I went over to this Chinese family's house and I tutored them and that was one of the most influential experiences to me on that entire trip. It was because I helped them, I still get emails. They say if I ever come back to Hong Kong they're my family.

In each of the instances cited above, my miscue appeared to help them get closer to what was most important to them. What was consistent was the tentative, exploratory nature of our conversations.

### **Participants' stories.**

Between the first and second interviews, I listened to the oral recordings and read the typed transcripts to create a preliminary narrative, called their story, which was sent to each participant electronically. The participant stories reflected what I thought I had heard. Participants were invited to read and respond to the stories, noting any thoughts, emotional responses, inaccuracies, and omissions. They were asked to bring their responses to the second interview, which provided the starting point for the second

conversation. The participants corrected and shaped those stories further in the second interview.

Participants were informed that the story served two functions:

1. It allowed me to gain feedback from participants on my reflection of what I thought I had heard; and
2. It allowed me to test my initial interpretations of underlying values embedded in their stories.

Because of my need for feedback, I used conventions such as inserted question marks in parentheses (?) in the text when testing an interpretation in their story, and used participants' words from the transcript in quotation marks to show where I had made the interpretation. Values I was investigating were typed in **bold font** to make them stand out. Each of these interpretations was discussed as we began the second interview. Changes were made to the story based on the second conversation. (The participants' stories can be found in Appendix I.)

### **Researcher Assumptions (Epistemology/Ontology)**

I use the term *identity development* in this study to describe the process by which an individual learns to discern and use her own voice as consistent and distinct from those around her (whether family, peers, culture, or media influences). People's stories are essential, critical to their self-concept, and related to how people make sense of the world and their part in it. This raises some problems which are inherent in the study of meaning. Humans, according to Polkinghorne (1988), have a synthetic kind of existence, wherein the realms of matter (the material realm), life (the organic realm) and meaning or consciousness (the mental realm) are fused. Grounding his claims in the concept of

*emergence* in systems theory, Polkinghorne asserted that *different kinds of reality exist*. One of the projects of the mental realm is knowledge of the whole self (Polkinghorne, 1988). This occurs through structured or unstructured means such as self-reflection. The human sciences, for example, represent the scientific organization of one part of the human realm “differentiating itself in order to comprehend its own characteristics” (p. 3). In this narrative project, I used the tools of the human sciences in the structure of the open-ended interviews to invite self-reflection (meaning-making) on the part of research participants as well as myself. The opportunity for self-reflection was consistently identified by participants as the most rewarding aspect of participation.

The study of meaning-making requires linguistic data (Giorgi, 1986). Hermeneutics (the art and science of interpreting linguistic data in the form of texts in context) is concerned with explication and exegesis (Steele, 1986). “Human experience is hermeneutically organized according to the figures of linguistic production” (Polkinghorne, 1988). Human science research then reads, hears, and interprets the texts of those productions. The goal of that analysis is not to produce or control human experience, but to deepen and enlarge our understanding of human experience (Polkinghorne, 1998).

This study was conducted with the premise that it is the researcher’s (my) responsibility, and that of the institution as a community, to support the learning and growth of the student as a whole person. The student is a citizen who will develop the capacity to participate in a complex world, to make difficult personal and professional decisions, and to struggle with choices in which a binary right/wrong answer is not an option. To support the quality of learning necessary for that degree of self-awareness,

self-efficacy, and reflexivity, I sought to understand what some students have experienced as helpful. I wanted to find what contributed to their developing sense of self (including personal and career identity) and to their understanding of the values, gifts, strengths, and abilities they might bring to the world.

### **The ethics of relationship.**

One of the ethical challenges of narrative research occurs in the implicit and explicit elements of the contracted relationship. As a researcher, I wanted to obtain information (data) from my research participants in a way that reflected my humanist beliefs. It had to be congruent with my professional training and natural inclination to understand and respect the participants and their life experiences. In the process, I had to acknowledge the possible influence on participants' expectations of the relationship. Their attributions of knowledge or expertise to my role as researcher were implicit and they evolved as we engaged in the process of sharing information. I transformed the data into a story and gave it back to them for their response and feedback. While the consent forms (see Appendices D, E, & F) dealt with the research process, the most challenging aspect of the research method for me involved reflexive monitoring of my consciousness, in order to maintain what Josselson (2007) called the *ethical attitude*, recognizing my dual relationship with my participants.

### **Reflexivity.**

Researching in the area of practice has necessitated constant reflection on my part or what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) called wakefulness. This reflection-in-action is essential to the design and processes involved in conducting a qualitative inquiry. Also referred to as reflexivity (Horsburgh, 2003), it requires that I acknowledge each action

and decision as affecting the meaning of the experiences under examination (see *Piloting the Guide*). The research process for this study required that I stay open to the questions that arose from ongoing learning. After each interview I made field notes that were used as part of the analytic process.

I kept a research journal to record impressions, questions, wonderings, and insights. I would consult my journal in conjunction with reading the transcripts and/or listening to interviews as part of my analytic process. This reflexive process was aided by frequent consultations with my supervisor, colleagues, and conversations with qualified peers.

### **Validity**

Qualitative research methods share an awareness of validity issues (Ashworth, Giorgi, & de Koning, 1986; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 1998b; Whittmore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). Several researchers have sought to re-conceptualize validity and generate more accurate terms, such as trustworthiness, credibility, authenticity, dependability, and explanatory power (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995; Lather, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Mishler (1990) proposed “validation” as a more appropriate term for the process through which evaluative claims for trustworthiness are made: “Validation is understood as embedded within the general flow of scientific research rather than being treated as a separate and different type of assessment” (p. 419).

The following issues are vital: (a) whether or not the findings can be trusted and used as the basis for actions and policy decisions, and (b) whether the descriptions offer accurate portraits of the common features and structural connections manifest in the collected data (Polkinghorne, as cited in Valle & Halling, 1989). Howe and Eisenhart

(1990) referred to Lincoln and Guba (1985) to describe the “credibility of the data” (p. 651) to the people who provided it as the standard for internal validity in naturalistic inquiry. The comments of the participants of this inquiry provided that credibility:

Heidi: It was really interesting having my whole experience in a nutshell, two and a half pages. It was really good. It was really insightful. Which is what I think that I said, I was kind of surprised about [at the beginning of our second interview].

Jonathon had corrected a misrepresentation about his repetition of his first-year courses at a community college in his small town at the beginning of our second conversation. He then went on to say:

Jonathon: It was interesting. Definitely very interesting to read through that. I didn't find a whole lot distressing about it.

Janet: No?

Jonathon: I think I'm pretty self-aware so I wasn't surprised by what I had to say. Having it read back to me, I didn't at any point go, oh, geez, is that really who I am kind of thing, cause I think...

Janet: But it did kind of match?

Jonathon: Oh, yeah, absolutely it matched what I thought and said. And how I feel about it, it's not pretty necessarily all the way through. But, it's definitely how I felt, how I feel, about things. Definitely highlights some areas that I might need to work at, maybe some attitude, attitude adjustments sort of.

Janet: Which pieces?

Jonathon: Definitely a sense of complacency. Almost, self-aware to the point where I'm more, like, too willing to admit that I was wrong, and almost using that as a way

of not having to do anything about it. By admitting that I'm completely comfortable in a lot of situations, it sort of seemed like a way of absolving myself of responsibility, complete responsibility for it. Do you see what I'm saying?

These clarifying conversations served to introduce rich detail that had been missing in our first conversation.

### **Trustworthiness.**

In a constructivist approach to determining validity in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Lincoln & Guba, 2000), "trustworthiness" is generally recognized as Guba and Lincoln's (1981) translation of scientific internal and external validity criteria into appropriate indicators of quality in non-positivist research, comprising credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Trustworthiness is assessed through an audit of the process by which the end product has been achieved (Horsburgh, 2003; Whitehead, 2004). This inquiry meets the criteria of trustworthiness through the processes of member checking: (a) by clarifying my interpretations in each conversation, (b) by creating an interim narrative for each participant, which became the exploratory starting point of the second interview, and (c) through the construction and maintenance of an audit trail.

### **The audit trail.**

The audit trail is informed by "a large volume of researcher-generated data, including notes about the context of the study, methodological decisions, data analysis procedures, and self-awareness of the researcher" (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993, p. 219). As mentioned earlier, I made field notes after each interview as part of my learning and reflection process. These notes ranged from descriptions of participants' engagement and

observations of my or their responses to parts of the discussion, to reflections from various speakers and colleagues in the Doctoral Students in Education support group. In addition, I had access to recent, relevant research data (UVic Student Engagement Focus Groups, 2006) from a qualitative inquiry of student engagement. This allowed me to hear how or whether the participants' voices were consonant or dissonant from a much larger sample of undergraduate students discussing their personal, social and academic experience at this institution. I had the opportunity to participate in a multi-year, management-level reorganization process for the Division of Student Services, which I documented as part of my self-learning. My analytic process was documented visually as I experimented with numerous portrayals and concept maps of what I thought I heard or saw in the data. All of the above, in addition to the verbatim transcripts annotated with numerous questions, comments and observations, formed the audit trail for this inquiry.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter described the theoretical assumptions and perspectives of the qualitative research orientation adopted for this study and the narrative research methods used in the study, linking the research to the underlying methodological principles. The chapter explained the purpose and scope of the sampling and described the participants, recruitment strategies, and the piloting of the interview guide. It explained the interview process and introduced ethics by describing the use of the participants' stories as a form of member checking between interviews. The chapter discussed the assumptions of the researcher, reflexivity, the constructs of validity, trustworthiness, and the audit trail. Finally, the participants were introduced. Chapter 4 will give a brief description of each

participant and explain the narrative-phenomenological analytic process and the emerging themes, using the participants' voices.

## Chapter 4. Analysis and Results

*Of course the concept of the hermeneutical circle involves a logical contradiction, for if we must grasp the whole before we can understand the parts, then we shall never understand anything. Yet we have asserted that the part derives its meaning from the whole. And surely, on the other hand, we cannot start with a whole, undifferentiated into parts. Is the concept of the hermeneutical circle therefore invalid? No; rather we must say that logic cannot fully account for the workings of understanding. Somehow a kind of 'leap' into the hermeneutical circle occurs and we understand the whole and the parts together... To operate at all, the hermeneutical circle assumes an element of intuition.*  
(Palmer, 1969)

### Introduction

The objective of this study was to increase understanding of the contribution of curriculum in the psycho-social process of identity development in a group of twelve 20-24-year-old university students attending a mid-sized western Canadian university, as captured at or near the point of completion of undergraduate studies. The narrative methodological approach involved in-depth interviews, the creation of digital recordings and transcripts of each interview, creation and participant validation of a tentative story after the first interview, as well as the use of field notes based on researcher experiences, observations and self-reflexive questioning.

The first part of this chapter presents an overview of demographics, students at UVic and participants in this inquiry. It introduces each participant through the stories that they read and participated in shaping. The second part of the chapter will discuss the process of narrative-phenomenological analysis, using content from the interviews and participant stories to identify the patterns, themes, and stories emerging. In this process I will situate and identify relationships with various theoretical literatures, while seeking to keep my subjectivity as author and researcher present and awake (Clandinin & Connelly,

2000), that is, reflexively self-aware. The voices of the participants and the stories they told will illuminate the discussion.

### **Analysis**

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) observed that “analysis is a pervasive activity throughout the life of a research project” (p. 11). It is important to mention here that the participants in this study were engaged in the fluid process of inhabiting their life stories and shared experience in response to my invitation and questions. My analysis and understanding were not complete before I began writing and, in fact, will never be complete. My journey of understanding has evolved in the context of my own life and work, the rich intimacy of the data, and the thin atmosphere of theory as a mountaintop view. Geertz (1973) is generally believed to have coined the phrase “thick description,” characterizing the goal of qualitative ethnographic research. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) interpreted the term broadly and “fruitfully” in their use of the term “thick analysis,” which acknowledges the value of multiple analytic strategies.

This project has used a thick analytic process by approaching the data analysis with three distinct strategies. *Narrative analysis* spans a range of strategies and approaches. In this study I used what Lieblich, Rivka, and Zilber (1998) described as “holistic” and “categorical” approaches to analysis. In the first instance, I analysed the digital and transcribed data of each participant as a whole, adding to or correcting transcription errors to create an individual narrative. That story became the first part of the narrative I used to engage in “member checking.” At this point in the research process, my focus was on the individual’s whole experience and on engaging each participant in conversational “storying.” The participants’ voices and the printed words

combined to create a draft of “\_\_\_\_’s Story,” a different kind of *interim text*. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated, “Negotiation occurs from beginning to end” (p. 132).

Our second interview began with a discussion of their experience of reading their “Story,” their reactions, responses, and any insights emerging from it. For example, participants most consistently commented on the accuracy of the narrative, correcting chronology, supplying missing characters and so on. Our conversations then tended to turn to inferences the participant might have drawn from his initial reading of his “Story” to negotiation of more appropriate language. These aspects of our conversation seeded the second interview and helped to shape the final version of the chronological lived experience (see Appendix I).

Next, I used a categorical approach, adopted as Lieblich et al. (1998) described because of my interest “in a problem or a phenomenon shared by a group of people” (p. 12). I did not do this in a linear fashion; rather, it emerged through the use of what Richmond (2002) described as a “self-story map.” Following Richmond’s narrative analytic approach, I created a matrix that captured the dimensions of time (past, present, future) and intra- and interpersonal elements and topics imbedded in the questions (self, values, context or family, community, culture, curriculum, co-curriculum, work). Still working with individual narratives, I mapped each participant’s path using colour-coded post-it notes with highlights of their interviews to keep track of each participant. I was checking to see if I could understand their narratives from this different perspective. At this point, the patterns began to emerge in each participant’s story.

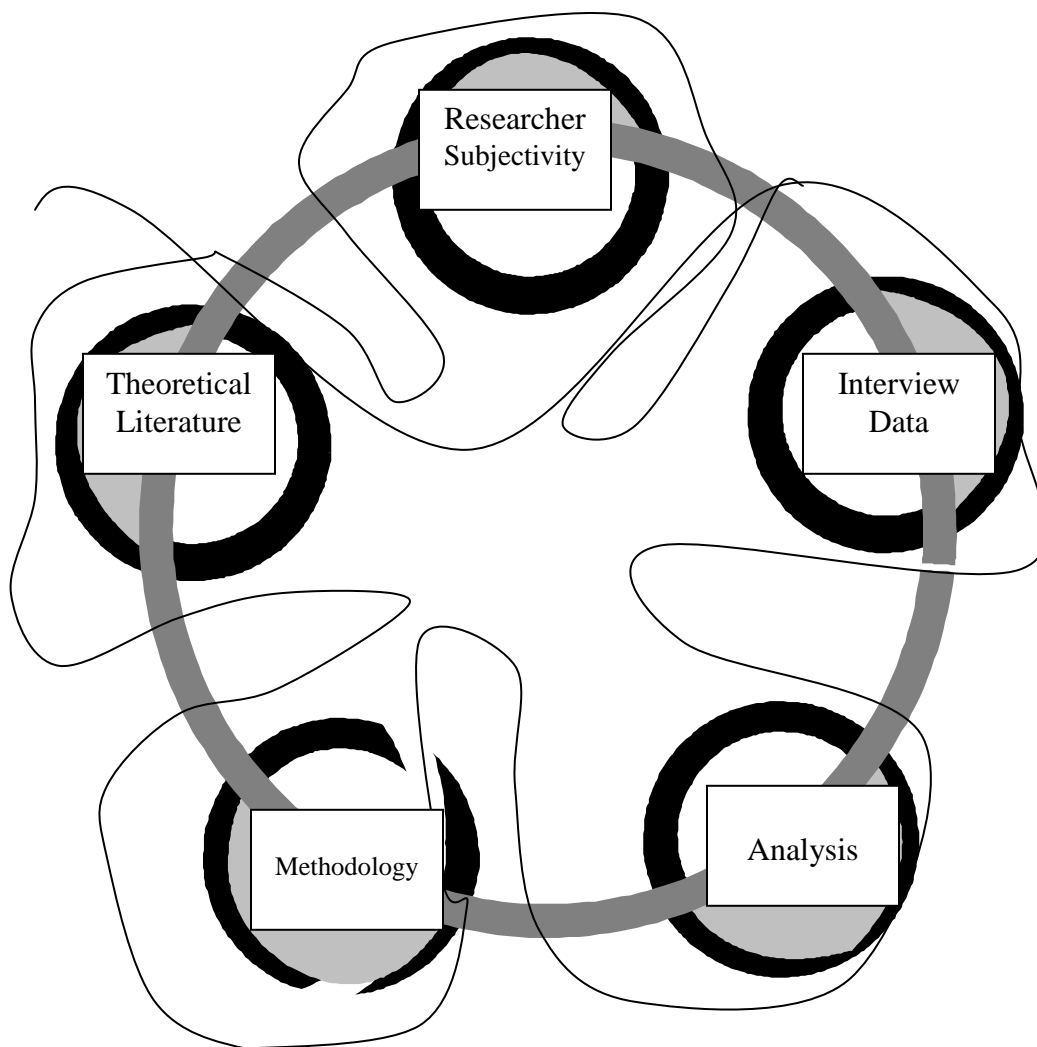
Finally, I created multiple copies of the interview transcripts and cut them up, having created folders labelled with each question from my interview guide. I used the duplicates to allow for material relevant to more than one question. I was able to see the patterns (similarities and differences) between participants most clearly.

Understanding the researcher's context is essential to narrative methodology because it helps to situate the participants' experiences alongside the researcher's need for a holistic, integrative and complex view of the person as she enters the "three-dimensional space" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It also informs the theoretical lenses of the researcher and helps to bring areas to the surface for critical self-reflection necessitated by my shifts in role from student to counsellor to researcher (Cresswell, 2005). My story began with my experience working as a counsellor in a university setting. Eighteen years of supporting university students in their personal growth, learning, career development, and life crises have situated my awareness and observations of developmental processes, individual (historical and cultural) aspects of lives, and systemic factors influencing students' participation and progress in their undergraduate education. I have had in-depth, reflective conversations with students about their life and learning experiences for nearly two decades. This has had a profound effect on my ability to listen. I now engage students in the process of listening for patterns in their own stories. Moreover, as a woman at mid-life, the experience of losing my mother to a devastating disease and becoming a grandmother during the research process, has influenced my own sense of self and my understanding of the life-long process of growth through disorienting life experiences and the elements and process of reorientation. In this research project, each participant shared their story and the sense

they had made of their experiences. They described their most powerful learning experiences, what engaged them, and how their thinking had changed during their undergraduate experience. While each story was different, common threads emerged in the fabric of their narratives.

The following figure (Fig. 2) depicts the “hermeneutic circling” that illustrates the non-teleological process of moving from parts to whole to parts. Note that there is no identified beginning or end to the process. The five aspects of the study (Methodology, Researcher Subjectivity, Interview Data, Analysis, Theoretical Literature) are depicted to indicate one can move into the material from any dimension. The image calls to mind the phrase *experiencing the experience* (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It illustrates the experience of the tensions that pulled me from one dimension to another, from the full involvement of the intimate textual and auditory data to the “cool observation” (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 81) of a more philosophical or theoretical place, while working to acknowledge my part in the tidal elements I was studying. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) called the “why” of social science inquiry *making meaning of experience*. This process of analytic movement is part of the negotiation of understanding, curiosity, and purpose of narrative inquiry. It reveals the tension between the use of theory as a kind of structuring framework. The literature that is reviewed and the emerging patterns of participants’ stories are a “kind of conversation between theory and life, or at least, between theory and the stories of life contained in the inquiry” (p. 41).

**Figure 2. “Hermeneutic Circling”**



### **Demographics: An Overview**

At the University of Victoria, the Canadian University Survey Consortium data (CUSC, 2008) provided us with a snapshot of undergraduate student characteristics. We know that our students tend to come from British Columbia, with 33% coming from communities with populations numbering less than 50,000 and 27% coming from communities of over 300,000. Women students outnumber men by just over two to one (59% women, 27% men). Two out of 10 students (20%) identify themselves as belonging to an ethnic or cultural group other than Aboriginal or White. Approximately 6% of this university's students self-identify as international.

The characteristics of the students who responded to the in-class presentations and poster advertisements (see Appendix C) for this research project illustrate some of the demographic tendencies described above, but also differ in some interesting ways. Nine of the twelve participants came from or were raised in BC communities (75%). Five of these were raised in communities with populations over 50,000. Three participants were born and raised in Victoria and lived at home at the time of the interviews (25%). Two of the twelve participants were born and raised in other provinces. Nine of the participants were women (75%). Five participants identified as ethnicities other than Aboriginal or White (42%). One participant identified as an international student (8%). While it is interesting to note that a higher percentage of participants in this study are first generation Canadians or belong to ethnicities other than Aboriginal or White, it is beyond the scope of this project to investigate the relevance of culture in the formation of identity.

However, I will comment on the themes relating to culture and identity and indicate possibilities for further research in chapter 5.

### **Participant Snapshots**

The following is a list of participants with their degree programs and a brief descriptive snapshot:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Degree Program</b>
<b>Sharon</b>	B Com Coop Commerce (Entrepreneurship Program)

Sharon is an outgoing Caucasian woman in her twenties. Born in a small town in northern BC, Sharon's family moved to Victoria when she was four years old. Sharon spoke of growing up in a family that was strong and close and "100% supportive." Her family consists of her father, a college science professor, her mother, a physiotherapist, herself (the oldest) and her two younger sisters, the older of whom is a national-level biathlete. Sharon acknowledges that she has always been the kind of person to "take it to the max" (taking five or six courses every term, taking harder subjects so she could keep her academic options open, choosing international coops and exchange experiences). As she described the many class projects she has worked on, Sharon said she was always the group leader, even when she made a conscious choice not to lead. She described her learning as an undergraduate as condensed, fast and broad (not deep): "They drag you across a whole load of subjects so fast and you just touch on an idea and don't really have any more time." While acknowledging that she chose to take a full and often heavy load, Sharon seemed to view her learning as exposure to ideas, which she can now "go back and research," rather than learning to think deeply and critically about a subject. Through



school, where his friendship with another outsider, “the only Chinese guy in town, who was also very bookish and was into math” fed and nurtured that competitive drive. Jerry describes himself as a “contrarian,” saying that he has long known that he enjoys a good debate and often takes the “opposite position just for the sake of taking the opposite position.” Jerry spoke of his schooling and family as being powerful in shaping his interests and determination to work hard; he has been a scholarship student throughout his undergraduate degree. Jerry describes his experience at UVic as more “refining” than formative. For him, a lot of those formative things were a part of high school. He believes that students (at UVic) are very privileged but do not recognize it. He thinks a lot about class structure and says that he sees UVic as pretty “elite.” He does not have much respect for students who “like to ally themselves with the working class when they’re really part of a very privileged elite.” Jerry identifies themes and characters from literature to help him illustrate his story. He gives examples like the character Jubal Harshaw from *Stranger in a Strange Land*, the main character from Alice Munro’s story, *Who Do You Think You are?* and even Marg Simpson from *the Simpsons*. Having friends who are smart enough and well read enough to understand his more esoteric references is important to him. Jerry has been accepted at a number of law schools across the country and spoke of his difficulty making a decision as to which was the best. He said he has finally decided to attend UBC, again on scholarship.

### **Heidi**

BSc with distinction  
Psychology

Born in a small town in Alberta to Caucasian Canadian parents, Heidi is the oldest of four children. Heidi said she lived in Alberta until she was five, then moved to Ontario

for five years, then to the lower mainland through high school for five years and has been at this university for five years, where she has completed a BSc in psychology. Heidi's father started his working life at the penitentiary having barely finished high school. He has risen through the system to a position of national authority. Her mother went back to school five or six years ago and has now become a teacher. Heidi says that throughout her university education she has pursued her interests consistently, wondering about changing sometimes but always moving forward toward a BSc. In the last year she says "all the pieces have come together." Heidi reports that relationships are very important to her and have contributed to her learning and growth in numerous ways. One source of great pride and fulfillment for Heidi is the accomplishment of her degree through her own hard work; she has paid her own way and wishes that accomplishment could be reflected on her transcript. When asked about her self-learning, Heidi said she has become more confident in her ability to believe that maybe she is a little bit "above average."

**Pami****BSc Honours Psychology**

Pami is an international scholarship student from Southeast Asia. Born to parents who are both government officials, Pami is the older of two daughters. From the age of four she began her international journey, living in two Middle Eastern countries until the age of eight. Between eight and twelve Pami and her family lived back in Southeast Asia. Then at fourteen or so, the family moved to Israel, returning home for Pami's high school years. After so many years in international schools, Pami says she did not adjust well to schools in her home country and so stayed in the international school system until she came to this university three years ago, where she started in second year. Pami says that

she has grown to appreciate more about her collectivist culture, its strengths, and its influence on her as she learns and experiences more about people, knowledge, and life in a university halfway round the world. Pami initially aimed for a business degree in Canada because “everybody” at home is doing a business, engineering or science degree. She changed very quickly into the psychology program, where she has thrived. Pami says she never expected to have the research experience or the hands-on learning that she is gaining now. Pami says that her experience here happened because she found opportunities through Peer Helping and work or study positions.

**Jonathon**

BA  
English  
Minor History

Jonathon was born and raised in a small town in northern B.C. The only child of his parents’ marriage, Jonathon has older half-sisters from his father’s first marriage with whom he is close. Jonathon’s post-secondary education started at Simon Fraser, where he went after graduating as valedictorian from his high school class. Although Jonathon acknowledges it was not a great beginning, he is quick to point out the freedom he expected to find or lose himself in that anonymous first year. Jonathon returned home the next spring and went back to community college to retake his first-year courses. He came to this university in second year and described that as a good year. He describes his experience here as mixed. When asked whether his expectations have been met or whether they have changed, Jonathon said that in the areas of anonymity (he expected it), and academic challenge (his profs know a lot about very focused areas of knowledge), his expectations have been met. On the other hand, he says he does not have a relationship

with any of his professors particularly. Jonathon says he is burned out and has lost his desire to be the “best” student he could be. When asked about changes in his thinking, Jonathon sees himself as less confident academically now than when he started at this university. What he sees as most different is his inability to care: “I don’t have the gumption or the drive anymore. And I can’t figure out why that is.” Jonathon says that teaching is what people expect him to do with his English degree and although he does not think he really wants to do that, he is considering applying for the PDP Program at another BC university next year.

**Julia** BA with distinction  
Psychology  
Minor Interdisciplinary Studies

Julia says she has lived in Victoria, in the same house, her whole life. Born into a Caucasian Canadian family, to a public health nurse mother and a chiropractor father, she has one older sister, three-and-a-half-years older, and describes their family as “very close.” Coming from a positive high school experience with lots of extracurricular activities and an involvement in leadership, Julia says that when she got to university she “hit the ground running.” Initially registered in sciences, Julia says she learned quickly that five courses a semester would interfere with extra-curricular engagements, so she cut down to four courses by January of her first year. She recognized that sciences, which she had chosen because she thought she wanted to become a neurosurgeon, did not ignite passion, a necessity in her life. Her sister recommended she try a psychology course and Julia realized then that she had found the right discipline. The course of Julia’s academic experience changed dramatically, however, in the fall of her second year. Going to the

doctor one day, Julia found herself in hospital with a life-threatening diagnosis within 24 hours. Going from full speed and full participation to full stop and an uncertain future has changed her in many ways, she says. Foremost among these is Julia's recognition of what is important, and what is not. Julia says she now has a strong appreciation for quality relationships. Learning through relationships has been a major part of Julia's personal learning journey while at university. She says she is now much more aware of how she defines and chooses friends. Julia still has mixed feelings about having to monitor her energy and choose her activities more carefully than "before." She can see that her identity was wrapped up in her achievements and perceived indomitable strength. Some of the co-curricular programs in which Julia has participated have offered her opportunities to learn from different people and to learn varied ways of thinking. Julia says this has contributed to her appreciation of diversity. She experiences herself as more open-minded now, in part because of her work with international students (as a cultural assistant), Orientation programs, and Peer Helping. Julia's momentum and intensity are evident as she describes researching career options, doing informational interviews with lawyers, and organizing a European trip after graduation, while planning her next year's sabbatical before beginning law school.

**Anita**

BA with distinction  
Psychology  
Minor Women's Studies

Born in the lower mainland, Anita lived in an outlying suburb of Vancouver until she came to Victoria to attend university. Anita was born to Indo-Canadian immigrant parents and has one sister, six years older. Anita's father completed grade 10 and works

in the mill and as a taxi driver. Anita's mother completed a history degree in India but worked in a family store because of her limited English skills. Anita attended a small private school in her home community, which had a very culturally diverse population for a small town. Looking back, Anita can see that experience of diversity throughout her education had a huge impact on her learning interests and subsequent career goals. Anita describes herself growing up as "two people," one at home and one in the community. She has developed her own context here and speaks of the "hybrid culture" she and her sister have created for themselves. Anita says she came to this university knowing she wanted to be a counsellor and get into psychology. It was when she started taking Women's Studies courses that her ideas on who she wanted to help and how began to crystallize. She says she came to university expecting to develop a "huge social network," and is leaving knowing that she needs to count as friends people with whom she can be completely honest, share conversations that have depth and are not just superficial. Anita makes a distinction between her women's studies experiences and her psychology experiences. A highlight of Anita's learning has been one of her upper-level women's studies courses, which required her to complete a practicum. She described her experience working with immigrant and refugee women at the Inter-cultural Association (ICA) as "revolutionary." "Most of it's reflecting [about] and analyzing the place you're working . . . it's way more practical learning." Anita's goals include work in NGOs, a post-graduate program in career and work counselling, life experience and then graduate school in counselling psychology.

**Nansi****B Ed  
Elementary Curriculum**

Born and raised in northern B.C., in a small town with a population under 4,000, Nansi is a first-generation South Asian Canadian. She has one brother, four years older. Her father came to Canada from India when he was 21 and her mother came when she was 13. Growing up in a family where her mother left high school at grade ten and her father came to Canada with a bachelor's degree in education, Nansi says she has always been aware of her parents' value of education. Because most of her friends in her home community were Caucasian, her parents' views, which she now sees as "not very traditional," seemed very different from other children's family's views. When she first came to university, Nansi says she had "the Hollywood image of university," "Res life, like all the parties, the nice big buildings, the sororities." Her first semester was very hard, she says, "Really tough." Her best friends now come from those early days when she met other girls on her floor who also came from small towns and could identify themselves as different from the girls who came from bigger cities. Nansi was motivated to come to this university because she knew she wanted to leave her small community (which she says she now appreciates for what it offered her growing up) and her friends, who mostly went to UNBC. Nansi is aware now of how making that choice has broadened her options and enlarged her network of friends. What helped Nansi get over her initially difficult transition, she says, was "letting go" of that "fear . . . of the big city, the fear of being alone, the fear of being away from my family, my friends." Nansi started meeting people in the cafeteria and in her classrooms and the more people she met, the more comfortable she got. A major part of her experience involved her work as a residence advisor, helping other students to adjust and be successful in their university

experience. Nansi says she has always known she wants “to be a teacher. I knew from day one.” She always wanted a job where she was around people and when she started babysitting she realized how much she loved being with children, discovering how curious they were about life and how intrigued about learning. Nansi says she knew then she wanted “to be the one that teaches them to read or write . . . that moment in your life (learning to read) is so important.” “I want to be kind of the facilitator.”

**Katie****BA Psychology**

Born in the lower mainland of B.C., Katie has two brothers, one older and one younger. Katie’s father finished high school and although Katie’s mother has only a grade-seven education, Katie describes her as “self-educated” and “very smart.” In her early years, Katie says her family life was “pretty cool.” Katie says that things began to deteriorate, at least on the inside of her family, when financial problems forced them to sell their home and move to another outlying suburb of greater Vancouver. Katie began to experience difficulties at school: “It was pretty tough actually starting grade four in a new city” and she described shyness and social anxiety as part of her challenge dealing with other kids at school. Katie’s parents divorced when she was about 15. When her father moved her and her brothers into the home of his new partner shortly after the family dissolved, Katie says she decided to leave the country and travel after high school. Her need for independence has influenced how she has managed her university and work life since leaving home. Katie said she got involved with the Students Working Abroad Program (SWAP) and spent the better part of a year in New Zealand and Australia, where she went on her own and worked in a variety of jobs to pay her living and travel costs.

When she returned and moved to Victoria, Katie says that she learned how to make a budget and went out immediately to look for work. She still has the job on campus. Katie says she took out student loans but did not want to use them. She saved and invested them, using a system of accounts to help her save money for things like tuition. Katie worked two jobs while going to school full time during her second and third years, reducing to one job in the fourth year. She was very clear that she did not want to graduate with debt. While she has done well academically, she acknowledges that work has had an effect on her participation at university. Katie feels frustrated that, in a way, she is competing with people whose parents are paying for their entire education with the result that “you’re not really on the same starting line.” Katie says she has definitely learned what hard work is and how to schedule her time. Katie sees a connection between the stress of university, working so hard to graduate without debt, and her body’s ability to keep itself healthy. Katie is not sure, however, that her thinking has actually changed, or would be different if she had not attended university. She attributes most of the shifts in her thinking to personal experiences outside the classroom, comparing herself to other people. Katie states that she has a very practical, career-oriented focus in her education, and wishes that she could have taken more focused, specialized courses earlier. When asked to describe her most powerful learning experiences at university, Katie said there were not many but she described “favourite” professors as being those who “live for what they’re teaching.” Katie says this helped her resonate with the concepts, rather than “memorize” and “spit it out.” Katie is currently researching grad school possibilities. She believes that she needs grad school to work in the ways that she wants (with children, in a



of his “life learning” occurred outside the classroom. He says he’s learned that flexibility is critical in learning how to work with different people, being willing to let go of “your own agenda.” What David values most in his learning is his ability to think critically, not to accept information or knowledge at face value. He knows he will end up working with people. He wants to help people and sees travel in his immediate post-graduate plans, particularly Europe and China (“I want to go see my home”) and realizes that change, and working at accepting change, will always be present in his life, including multiple careers.

**Rosa**

Diploma  
Intercultural Education & Training  
BA Psychology

Born in the provincial capital, the only child of immigrant parents from northern India, Rosa says that her father came to Canada in his early twenties to do a PhD in math. He studied at several universities in Canada, completing two master’s degrees before returning to India to marry Rosa’s mother. Rosa says that in high school she was never an academically strong student, but was deeply involved in student leadership activities, and a very active member of her high school community. Rosa went to a community college for two years and although she was not academically inspired, she says she worked hard there. Rosa chose to transfer to this university because she could start in the summer, something she was keen to do. Looking back, Rosa now sees that she did not perceive a challenge in coming to this university. She knows herself as someone who likes “to accomplish things” and found that she was not committed or excited to be at school here. Her marks suffered and she failed some courses. Rosa now recognizes that she dealt with

that unhappiness “by not handling it.” Rosa says she knew she wanted to major in psychology from quite an early age (around grade 11 she made a career-related decision to “do my PhD in psychology”). Although she has taken longer than she wanted to finish this degree and recognizes she may not go to graduate school right away, Rosa strongly appreciates that she has, finally, in her last year of school, found the engagement and commitment she has been missing, mostly in the co-curricular programs she has joined. Although her degree is in psychology with a diploma in intercultural education and training, Rosa says what she loves about the intercultural emphasis is the practicum she is doing at the Victoria Immigration and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS), where she works with children. Rosa has applied for a CIDA internship, hopes to travel in Southeast Asia and India, and explore her interest in working with children.

**Kenzie**

BFA  
Visual Arts  
Coop Hum/Fine Arts

Kenzie was born in a small town in Alberta, where she lived in a rural setting with her parents and a younger brother for the first seventeen years of her life. She loved going to school and for the most part thrived on the attention and encouragement she received from her parents and teachers. Kenzie completed a partial IB program in grade twelve and participated in numerous clubs, often with a social justice theme or involving some form of creative expression. She describes her involvement “in everything” in high school as a peak experience. When she graduated from high school, her “whole family” decided to move to the coast. BC seemed like a good place to head for university and Kenzie started out in the writing program. That summer, however, marked the beginning

of what Kenzie now calls the “dark years,” the year she turned 18. Kenzie describes herself as feeling “homeless.” “My old life was my identity so when I moved my identity was gone.” While she still did pretty well at school, she felt lonely, without focus and was dwelt on her “own sadness.” The lowest point of that year occurred during the summer between first and second year, when she had returned to her summer arts camp job with a local recreation centre, but was fired after receiving a warning. While for Kenzie the warning was the signal that caused her to open up to her parents, something she had not done for many months, it was too late to save her job. Going to work at a labouring job picking flowers for the rest of that summer contributed to Kenzie’s reflection on her choices, her sense of herself, and her loss of purpose. She realized that she wanted to switch her major (to visual arts). Beginning second year in visual arts, Kenzie began to thrive academically. She says she also began to add in, “filling my life with stuff” like volunteering for a variety of creative projects.

An academic highlight for Kenzie involved joining the Co-op Program. She says the experience has helped her to regain her confidence in her ability to “have an awesome job” and has helped her to realize that there are, in fact, lots of jobs in the arts. Kenzie’s successful placement in Alberta at an art gallery gave her personal satisfaction and the recognition that she did it on her own. Kenzie says she has learned not to attach herself to what she creates and to see it as separate from herself. This means she does not take criticism of her work personally. Passion for growth, learning, and challenge is just one area of strength for Kenzie, who is beginning to discover that she does not have to give up her “child-like” joy in life or all her varied passions to be an adult in the world.

## **Emergent Themes**

### **Family, Community, and Culture as Foundational Context**

It is obvious that university students arrive on campus having already established a foundation of knowledge, experience, expectations, and beliefs. This study gathered the historical elements of the participants' stories as the essential, foundational context for the students' identity narratives and as influential factors in their university experience.

#### **Ethnicity and culture.**

I will use the terms "ethnic" and "cultural identity" in the context of this study as interchangeable (Ortiz, 2000). Five of the twelve participants represented ethnicities other than White. Four of those students self-identified as first-generation Canadians and one as an international student. One of the Caucasian participants self-identified as second-generation Ukrainian. This was an unanticipated aspect of the research project and one which I found intriguing. As stated elsewhere, having allowed for broad criteria I was curious to see who would come forward and what their stories would be. What appeared was great diversity in the experiences of the participants and in their worldviews. The linking element in the theme of culture as it relates to identity development appears to be *salience*. By that I mean for students who come from cultures other than the dominant culture, it appears that identity development may be more complex and require more "psychic energy." The experience of *difference* or what Kristeva (1991) calls "self and Other in a divided subject," was a significant factor for this group of participants. Sorting out what that difference meant to them involved a number of intersecting factors and

indicated an alive, internal “tension” identified by Aoki (2005, p. 382), which I will explain using the students’ voices.

**Being different: Gender, class and ethnicity.**

Nansi spoke of her experience growing up in a small family, in a small town, with a small immigrant community, and then coming to university in Victoria:

I loved [my hometown] growing up. It was nice because walking around town you would know everyone. Even now I go back and right away I’m going to go to the mall and I’ll bump into my teachers, people I babysat for, old friends. And so it was always nice. But obviously at that time growing up I didn’t really like it because it was, whatever you did, everyone knew, because it was such a small community. (So, no privacy.)

None at all. Especially with the immigrant community, it was like because my family is actually, they’re not very traditional but they are traditional in a sense, because it’s just, my brother and I talk about this a lot. Growing up we were always restricted to do certain things you know like, the typical like oh, I want to go out to a party. But that was like, no you can’t. Well, I’m so proud of being like Canadian and I’m so proud of being Indian. Both are such rich, rich cultures and I love having that, I don’t even know what I can call it, but I love having that, just, you know . . . (as part of who you are.) Exactly. But it can be a challenge because even to relate to, it’s like, I don’t really relate to my parents 100%, I don’t really relate to a lot of my friends, not necessarily if they’re Caucasian, but other descendents [of immigrants] too, it’s like, where do I stand? . . . More and more like I find that, this kind of relates to your research too, with school and coming

here again, Victoria's not very diverse at all. The more I start to appreciate my culture, both, and try to incorporate both in my life because both are so important in my life.

Nansi noted that her parents had expectations of her based on her gender:

A lot of it has to do about, it's tough, a lot of it has to do about, like, kind of like the role of the woman. They always encouraged me, actually, like, forced it, basically, like no dating before you're married. Like that was, because in their culture, dating isn't something that's common and it's taboo. And so the man that you're going to date is the man that you're going to marry. And so all through high school I didn't date very much at all, and then I came here and then you know.

Anita was also raised in a small family in a small town. She spoke of her experience during high school and how that has shaped her values and cultural identity:

Now it's uh, kind of different because as you get older you surround yourself with people who understand you and relate to you and that sort of thing. But especially like in high school all you want to do is be the same. I was like two different people at school and at home. Now my parents have come to accept the fact that me and my sister have made up sort of a hybrid culture for ourselves. We have our own values that we're going by. We have developed this attitude that I won't tell you things that will deak you off. (It's like an unstated rule.) Yeah, I wouldn't tell my parents when I was dating. I know it would bring up this like huge fight. I won't bring it to their house. I'll live my own. (What you're saying is Respect doesn't equal telling you the truth. It equals not rubbing my choices in your face.)

Yeah, exactly. I felt like I was always faking, because I never did tell my parents things like even when I was in high school and when I would go over to a friend's and stuff because they were so strict about things. I always made good decisions because I knew there was nobody who was going to call me and ask me because my parents didn't know what I was doing. I've always been really smart about the decisions I made. I still don't really drink or do drugs. Even though I could be because they're not here watching me.

David, who self-identified as “Victorian” spoke of his family's roots in China:

My grandparents were originally from China and all of my extended family— aunts, uncles, and whatnot—are all over here in Victoria, mostly here in Victoria. I have an aunt who lives in Vancouver and that's about it, so . . . . Everyone came here, everyone, both sides of the family too. So that's why, like, when we say I'm from Victoria, I'm very much from Victoria.

Because his parents came to Canada in their early teens, David saw them as holding more tension between the two cultures they inhabited:

My parents are a prime example of what it could be a culture clash. They think very traditionally Chinese in some ways and yet their thinking is so liberal in other ways too. Like they their values are very much traditional Chinese in a sense like you should do this and you should do these kinds of things. But when it comes to the actual approach to carrying out what they think, they're pretty, they're a lot more liberal and flexible than what I'm accustomed to seeing from people who come from mainland China and Hong Kong.

David's family history contributed significantly, he believes, to his parents' expectations of his degree:

There's definitely, I mean it's funny because like my grandparents did not come from a very wealthy family at all. Like they were mostly just farmers in China and whatnot and they lived in Hong Kong for a while. My grandmother kind of stayed at home. My grandfather on my dad's side was working at the shipyard. And my grandfather on my mother's side was just a bus driver. So like pretty basically, just blue-collar kind of jobs . . . . I'm going to go and get my education and hopefully come out into the workforce and get a really good job. And I realize that's really important for them as well because I'm going to be the first member in my immediate family who's going to have a university degree. Because my father went to college just for a couple of years but he didn't actually, but he didn't get a full on bachelor's, he had like an associate degree. And my mom just got a job straight out of high school, basically. Because back then that's pretty much all you needed, right? And in this day and age, that's definitely not enough any more, and they realize that and they're helping me through school, they're funding me through it for the most part, which I'm really appreciative of because let alone worry about your grades, I mean, worrying about your finances would be a completely different thing all together as well . . . . That's one of their reasons why they were really pushing for me to actually go to university in the first place was, you know, get your education. I mean, your education won't necessarily guarantee you a six-figure salary which I'm not interested in anyways, but it's definitely going to get you more than what you would have with just high school.

### **Values.**

Embedded in participants' narratives are values which inform and permeate their stories. These values influence the developmental work of individuals in their twenties. They are influenced in turn by the family, community, and cultural milieu in which the participants of the study grew up, went to school, and experienced life.

I paid particular attention to the values (implicit and explicit) described by the participants. Polkinghorne (1988) said that Dilthey first explained that "valuation" was part of the cultural milieu. Bruner (1990) also noted, "Values inhere in commitment to *ways of life*, and that ways of life in their complex interaction constitute a culture" (p. 29). He cited Taylor, who pointed out that the values underlying a way of life are only "lightly open" to "radical reflection" (p. 29). This certainly fit with my experience of participants' conscious understanding and articulation of their particular value systems. Values are an essential part of one's identity and at the same time locate one in a culture. In the rapid changes and growing complexity of our pluralistic modern life, confusion and conflict in values contributes to a sense of disorientation and uncertainty in commitment to life choices. It is not, as Bruner (1990) stated, through a "dogged insistence on *absolute value*, that these uncertainties will go away" (p. 30). However, in order to understand the process of self-learning, what Rorty describes as the drive to understand "why or whether our present view of the world is, roughly, the one we should hold" (1979, cited in Bruner, 1990, p. 30), it seemed important to explore the participants' experiences and the meanings they made from them as clues to the values they might hold, influenced by family, culture, and experience.

A consistent value theme in the foundation of these participants' contexts was *hard work*. Several participants mentioned how hard their parents worked, even if it was never mentioned at home as a value. For some participants, working hard related to their parents' strong motivation for their children's education. If their children got an education, they would have a *better, more rewarding, and lucrative career*. Marcia (1994) named the dual aspects of hard, steady work as "a worthwhile project" and of self as "a competent worker" as ingredients of identity work. Nansi, whose parents both emigrated from India, noted:

[My mom] went to high school in Prince George. But then she dropped out. And my dad was actually, he's actually a really brilliant man. He went to school in India and he got his bachelor's of education. And so he was a teacher, but obviously he came here and the degree was worthless. So he, but, even now, he's taken a lot of courses, and he teaches a lot of courses at the mill, like grading courses, and he does a lot of their technical stuff. And my mom never went to . . . high school was up to grade 10. My dad was, he's all about the education, all about going to school and all about life experiences. With my mom, because she had such a hard life and she worked, like picking berries, in the farms, and now she's a dishwasher, no she's a cook, sorry, at a restaurant. And she always [said], when we were younger, "Oh you don't want your mother's life," like, you don't want to go to work and like you don't want to like bend over backwards for these people and do all this hard work and all this labour and come home and stink like this. All yucky, like stinky. So she always said, "You want a good life and if you

want a good life you want education. You want something that you want to enjoy.

You don't want to do this.”

David, whose parents and their families emigrated from China, also felt this value in his family:

So, and coming to Canada was one of the things that they wanted to do in search of a better life, basically, and there's always been the expectation of me that I'm going to go to university, hence why I'm here, right. I'm going to go and get my education, and hopefully come out into the workforce and get a really good job. And I realize that's really important for them as well because I'm going to be the first member in my immediate family who's going to have a university degree . . . [My parents and grandparent are] very, oh, very, very hard workers. Harder workers than I will probably will ever, in a physical sense at least, right; working at shipyards is something that I've never experienced and probably never will.

This was related to *respect* and *reputation*, relating to one's character:

My family, I'd say, it's probably respect is a pretty important one. Although, it's funny because respect is one of those things with such a large grey spectrum between what is considered to give respect and what's not considered respectful and whatnot. I'm always taught that you should always greet your grandparents a certain way. And you should always work as hard as you possibly can. And you should, there's certain things that we deem important, not just because it's going to give you a better life or what not, but it's just one of those things, it's maintaining integrity of the person, in that sense, right? I mean, hardworking, it's hardworking because well if you work hard you're probably going to live pretty

well. But to my family it's not just hard working to get something, but it's hard working because it's showing people around you that you're capable of working hard . . . . And that's one of those things that I'm definitely I think I've realized that lately too, just being in school is the fact that my working hard in school has become part of my identity as a person.

Jonathon, born and raised in a small town in northern B.C., the only child of his parents' marriage, spoke of the messages he heard, but perhaps did not believe he had absorbed from his father, whose family emigrated from Poland:

Dad has worked hard his entire life. [For] myself, I'm not sure if that concept really translated too well. Certainly that was the idea. That hard work leads to salvation. My dad's one of these guys, he's like 70, and he's full of these gems of old school wisdom, "Hard work leads to salvation."

On the other hand, Jerry, a scholarship student throughout his undergraduate degree, recognized he had learned and absorbed the value of hard work from what his father said and did:

I think, um, the more I think about it the more I suspect that a lot of this work ethic comes from my dad. Because of course he was in the bank and then he became self-employed, so obviously a lot of it is based on how much you can hustle business . . . . But at the same time my dad took the same philosophy towards me that his dad took towards him which was something his dad, because he explained it when his dad was talking to him . . . . It was something to the effect of, "I don't care if you go to the bar and drink yourself stupid as long as

you're up at 7 to work" and my dad kind of gave me that. He wasn't pressuring me to do well in school or anything like that.

Most of the participants came from intact families. While parental educational backgrounds varied, all participants were clear that there was a *strong expectation in their family that they would pursue a university degree*. For some participants it connected to educational opportunities they saw that their parents had not had.

Anita, who grew up in the lower mainland and attended a small private school from Kindergarten to grade twelve, said:

Going to school is not an option. I never thought that I was not going to go to university . . . . My parents raised me to think I wanted to go to university. Oh, it's not like I was forced to go. There was always an expectation. I knew I was always going to go. My parents emigrated here from India. My dad only has a grade 10 education. From India. He works in a mill, and he's always been a taxi driver and truck driver . . . he wanted me and my sister to go to school.

Katie, whose parents divorced when she was in high school, was raised predominantly in a suburb of Vancouver, B.C. She had a similar message from her parents:

Well, my dad graduated high school. My mom only has a grade 7 education. And nobody in my family has ever gone to university. So from my mom's side she, well, my mom and my dad, they both were really adamant about, you know, us like studying and how important like good grades were and taking school seriously and that sort of thing. So me and my brothers were always like on the A honour rolls and all that stuff.

Jerry, who has lived in small communities on Vancouver Island all his life, felt strongly that his parents' not having a university education made him a minority:

My dad didn't go to university; my mom didn't go to university. And that's, by the way, that's something very crucial. I don't think I've ever met anybody at university who didn't have a least one parent who went to university.

Julia, who was born and raised in Victoria to professional parents, reflected a strong value for education as preparation for democratic citizenship:

We were always taught that education is power. Not that you need to be power hungry, but it certainly pays to be educated, to have the choices. And to be able to . . . well, education is democracy. To be able to think critically and stand up for yourself. I know my parents always believed in us, paying attention to our education.

For Heidi, born in a small town in Alberta, the support for education was there but coming to university felt like a more intrinsic decision, connected to who she was as an individual:

It was always a given that I was going to go to university after [high] school but my parents didn't tell me that. The brother who's two years younger than me, he did finish high school a couple years ago, and he works. He's working full time and he's also taking some courses at a college. My sister is in her honour year and she'll be going to university in the fall.

This was also Katie's experience:

Me and my brothers, we've all taken different paths. I'm the only one that's chosen university. My older brother's done trade school. Yeah, he actually

finished his trade school and is working as a plumber. And now he's going back to school to get more training, more education. And my little brother, he just graduated high school last year. He's doing his travelling thing now, actually in New Zealand, and he's getting back at the end of the month and he's going to do the performing arts school.

A sub-theme that many participants raised in conjunction with hard work revolved around *financial support*, or how they were *funding* their education.

Jerry said:

To be honest, university's a nice break because I never worked as hard as I did in high school. When I was in high school I didn't have a single day off. I was always busy doing something even if it was just studying or doing homework, because I was going to be goddamned if I wasn't going to get into university with a scholarship.

It is also a source of great pride and fulfillment for Heidi that she accomplished her undergraduate education through her own hard work; she has paid her own way and wishes that accomplishment could be reflected on her transcript. Heidi attributes some of her sense of achievement and increased confidence to knowing that she got through it paying her own way and volunteering at the same time.

For Katie, having had to work hard to support herself working two jobs while attending school full time has also been powerfully shaping, not always in positive ways:

Somebody that is in my position, who's working two jobs and doing full-time school and competing with people whose parents are paying for their entire education and they're still living at home, and they have amounts of time to get

better grades than you do, it's like, you're not, there's not really that, you're not really on the same starting line . . . . That was really hard.

Katie said that she had initially been turned down for financial aid because she was still living at home but her father was unwilling to help her financially, so she decided to travel and work for a while, seeking out the Students Working Abroad Program (SWAP) and travelling and working in New Zealand and Australia. Katie said:

And so by being away travelling and being able to get myself from one country to another on very little money, and kind of working my way around, then when I got back it just seemed easy. You know, get out there, get a job and do it that way . . . you know, I think it was the first or second day I was in the city and I was out looking for a job. And I had one by the end of that day and a good one, actually. I'm still there, working on campus.

For other students, being supported financially and/or by being able to live at home was something they recognized and appreciated as an expression of their parents' values and support for them. They saw that *financial support was a personal motivator*. It helped them get through some of the hard times.

For Julia:

They're very supportive of our education. In fact, while we're at university, they're paying for all our tuition, our books, car, house, entertainment. I know we've got it good, but they value it so much and they'll support us in whatever education we want . . . I very much value that. And we still work hard to get scholarships. I work very hard in the summer. I value that they totally support me. And their support does allow me to do well.

For Anita:

I'm lucky because I haven't had to take out student loans. My dad works seven days a week. He works like 12 hours a day. Like, he doesn't have a single day off in the week. He wouldn't let me and my sister pay for school. "This is my job," he says, "this is what I'm going to do." Both he and my mom have just always devoted their lives and always making it a priority that me and my sister will have an education and be able to go to the schools we wanted to. I think that in a sense I don't want to fail their ideas, 'cause that is their sole purpose for working.

However, Nansi recognized that working part time while at school, earning money, even if it was not enough to pay for her whole education, was important in shaping her focus and her work ethic:

I've always kept a very part-time like 20-hours-a-weekish type of job when I've been at school, except for first year. And I think that that, you make money and you spend your own money and it's also just that balancing, you kind of, you appreciate school more but you also try harder but you also realize what a \$600 class means. When you're making \$18 an hour that's a lot of, it takes a long time to earn \$600, so I think that aspect is very, very important for me. Like, when I started working I started doing a lot better at school.

For David:

And in this day and age, that's definitely not enough any more [a high school education], and they realize that and they're helping me through school, they're funding me through it for the most part, which I'm really appreciative of, because let alone worry about your grades, I mean, worrying about your finances would be

a completely different thing all together as well . . . I think I'm fortunate in that sense. Like it was always part of their belief that they were going to try to help me through it as much as they can.

For Nansi:

They [my parents] think education is the key to life . . . and with education they financially support me, they support me personally and, yeah. That was never an issue in our family . . . . [W]hen I was younger I was like, "whatever." Like, I was stubborn. I didn't really, I didn't understand where [my mother] was coming from and I didn't really care for it because it was like, "oh mother please," but now it's just like, yeah, and I totally feel for her, because she's right, she's a hardworking lady. Just to make, she makes \$10 an hour working her butt off. And it's tough and exactly, like, I would never want to have a job like that and she doesn't enjoy going to work all the time because it's hard and whatnot. So now I understand it and now I respect it and now I'm thankful that I have that image in my mind because it kind of keeps me going.

### **Experience: Disorientation and Reorientation**

None of the students who participated in this project had experiences as undergraduate students that were straightforward, linear, or reductive. Students' self-learning appeared to have unpredictable elements (O'Sullivan, 2004). These unpredictable elements are most concisely understood as *disorienting*. By that I mean that the encounter or experience somehow interrupted a tacit, "taken for granted" flow of experience. For example, early on in their experience at this university, many participants described a feeling of *disorientation* as they struggled to align their experience with their

expectations (in the way of, “I didn’t expect this to be part of my story”). The nature of the disorientations ranged from culture shock (for example, experiencing people and life as dramatically different from what they had previously known) to a dramatic change in relationships or personal wellbeing. What was significant, however, was that these disorienting experiences occurred as “potentiators” or catalysts for significant learning. When observed individually, they appeared as an unanticipated or unfortunate occurrence in a person’s life. When observed in the various participants, however, and over the multiple years of the undergraduate experience, there appeared to be a pattern. There was a connection between the destabilizing effect of the disorienting events and the *potential* self-learning that was part of their reorientation to their studies, their story and their identity. Some of the participants related several of these experiences over the course of their degree programs with varying levels of intensity and disorienting effect.

*Reorientation* refers to the experience of what Kegan calls the Subject/Object shift (1982, 1994). While students are in the midst of a disorienting experience, they are “in it.” They are the subject of their experience. While the disorientation may be what Mezirow (1991, 2000) described as an “epochal” event, like Julia’s experience, it could also be an “incremental’ experience,” “involving a progressive series of transformations in related points of view” (2000, p. 21). What students revealed in their narratives was a process by which their thinking about their experience shifted over time. As they reflected and reframed their beliefs and assumptions about themselves and their relationships, they reoriented to the community and to their learning, often with a new or different experience of their self-efficacy.

### **Expectations and experience.**

The students who participated in this project described a range of expectations. Some interesting connections occurred between the early expectations, as stated near graduation, and the students' experience of their own growth and learning (and the value they held for their learning experiences) as undergraduates. These experiences represented one of the earliest forms of dis- or re-orientation described by students.

Understanding student expectations of higher education is an important emerging research area (James, 2001; Miller, Bender, Schuh, & Associates, 2005). It acknowledges the growing recognition that understanding the relationships between students' expectations and institutions of higher learning is an underused tool in appreciating the complex interactions of academic learning and personal development (Baxter-Magolda & King, 2004). Understanding students' expectations helps to reveal where and how they choose to engage on campus.

David, who was from Victoria, had a vision of recreating what he had experienced in high school:

I thought it was just going to be, oh yeah, high school reunion.

Other students, like Nansi, had a "Hollywood image of university life," focused on "Res life, like all the parties, the nice big buildings, and the sororities and whatnot."

Heidi came with a boyfriend:

So at the beginning it was pretty optimistic, exciting. Wasn't really thinking too much about school. I figured I'd come out with a degree and get a job. No real plan about what I wanted to do. And yeah, I'll make some great friends and have some great experiences.

Sharon saw herself as very social, a local athlete, but was shocked by the discrepancy between her expectations and experience:

I think I expected a lot more sort of, like group bonding, meeting people and having interesting conversations, and you know, going for lunch more with people, but was really disappointed in terms of . . . it's hard to meet people here. You don't want to talk to people in class because you don't want to be disruptive . . . I think I expected a social atmosphere and really found that it wasn't.

For Sharon:

But, um, [it was a] huge slap in the face academically wise. I found that high school didn't prepare me at all. Basically, I think the biggest thing for me was time, I, the biggest thing to overcome was time. Time to write exams, the amount of time to complete assignments. If you're doing five, I always took five or six courses.

For Anita:

I lived in residence in first year. I'm pretty shy with people I don't know. I decided to live in Res so I could get to know people . . . . At high school I didn't have to make friends. I didn't know how to make friends. The last time I made friends was day one [in Kindergarten]. [In Res] it was a different atmosphere for me because people were into drinking and going out and partying and stuff and that's not me . . . . So, I found that to be really hard, my first year.

For Nansi:

And so yeah, that was really tough. I just remember my first four months . . . every night I'd go to bed crying. And every morning I'd wake up crying . . . I didn't know the city. I didn't know anybody. The university seemed huge to me.

For Heidi, the first disorientation occurred when her relationship ended suddenly three weeks into her first semester:

It was all really exciting and then right away it's, oh, I can't do this I want to come home. The only person I know isn't part of my life anymore . . . . So unfortunately the first couple of weeks I [had] spent in his building. And the first few weeks are quite crucial for making friend connections. So I felt totally, oh, I don't know anybody in my building and I'm not with him anymore.

For Kenzie, who moved with her family from Alberta, the disorientation she experienced in her first year was severe. Looking back, she described it as a loss of identity:

Everything changed. Nothing was the same as before. And it was so hard for me. Like there was, I can't think of it. Like there was this period of time where I felt homeless . . . . My house in Alberta, my parents built it with their hands [voice quivers, strong emotion] and they'd, I'd lived in it my whole life . . . . It was just so weird. And I had to, like driving away and looking out the back window and thinking like I'm never going to live there ever again . . . . So it was like a long time after I moved here that I felt like, I felt homeless, and I felt like you know, my old life was my identity so when I moved my identity was gone. It was like who am I?

When asked about expectations, Jerry stated that he came with goals rather than expectations:

[B]asically my goals were things like do well, do well enough to keep my scholarship, make that one good friend who will be, you know, the college roommate buddy that you'll have for the rest of your life, that sort of thing. Other than that, it was mostly, I think it was probably trying to preserve, come to think of it now, I was trying to preserve a lot of what I had in high school.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic disorienting experiences happened to Julia who, in her own words, “hit the ground running” when she first arrived at university. Julia was born and raised in the same house in Victoria and still lived at home at the time of our interviews. Initially registered in sciences, Julia said she arrived at university feeling well oriented to academic life:

I think I really saw university as a way for me to grow. It was a huge way for me to grow and I really wanted that. Maybe that's why I was so receptive [to the information and advice she received].

Julia had an older sister at the same university and had felt well prepared by her high school counsellors for the difference in size and anonymity of classes. Julia said she immediately joined two dozen clubs, made a point of introducing herself to her first-year professors and adjusted her course schedule in her second semester when she felt her science labs were interfering with her extra-curricular activities. Originally thinking she wanted to be a neurosurgeon, Julia said she picked up a psychology course in summer session between first and second year so she would not lose ground academically as a result of her co-curricular involvement. She immediately found an academic passion that

had been missing in her science courses. She made the decision to switch her major from sciences to psychology. All this steady progress and active engagement came to a halt, however, when:

I was actually really sick. I came in here, I was healthy my whole life. In my second year I was given a life-threatening diagnosis. Less than a week before I turned 19, in the middle of my second year. I went to the doctor, thought I was perfectly fine, and in less than 24 hours I was in the hospital. So I really learned. I have to say that has been the thing I've learned the most from in my life [with emphasis].

Her family was a strong source of support. However, Julia expressed surprise at some other sources of support:

Something also that I learned from UVic which I was kind of surprised. A lot of times they make the university kind of a bureaucracy; you're a seven-digit number. Once again all my profs knew me—even though I was in these giant classes with over 100 people, they all knew who I was. And so when I actually had to get things deferred, one of my profs broke down in tears when I told him about it. One of them wrote me a note, a letter for the hospital. One of them made me a CD with some interesting—being in psychology I was interested in some of the extra bonus lectures there going to be taught in school—one of the professors actually recorded this for me to listen to in the hospital.

A committed “overachiever,” Julia spoke of her connection to learning:

Up until I got the flu this year, throughout my entire illness, I never missed a single class. I love school so I don't see it as something to try to miss. I went to

school in the morning and did papers in the hospital in the afternoon. I just wanted to be there . . . . So much so that when I was in second year and I got this illness at the end of November, I still was in class in November. I couldn't write finals. I had to get them deferred.

and to being "driven:"

It's, yeah, it's a huge blow to your pride to have to stop when your self-identity is a lot caught up in what you can achieve. The fact that you can achieve so much to such a high level. And you have the admiration of people because of that. And all of a sudden you can't.

### **Managing Relationships (Partnered)**

Learning to manage adult relationships is one of the major tasks of identity development—figuring out who you are in relation to significant others, including family, peers, and intimate partners (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Not all of the participants were involved in partnered relationships, but for those that were, the relationship might be the site of their most intense and complex self-learning. While the *disorientation* of a relationship loss was pretty much universal among participants who experienced it, what differed were the coping strategies and how they *reoriented* toward school, learning, and community.

Jonathon's next disorienting experience came when the relationship he was in at the time he arrived dissolved during the summer between his first and second years at this university:

That relationship I'd been in dissolved over the last summer before my third year.

I'm a musician as well. I was in a band and got really busy over the course of the

summer . . . I used the band as a coping mechanism. Four guys who jammed three times a week and hung out on the weekend and it was really easy to forget about the issues I was working through as a result of the break up of that relationship.

This time (in contrast to his first-year experience) Jonathon managed to keep his academic life together by reducing his course load to four courses each semester, but he coped by shifting his focus to his life outside the university. There were consequences from his coping:

I tried to keep on top of my schoolwork and eked out decent grades. But it wasn't on the forefront of my mind . . . I was doing what I needed to do to maintain my grades . . . My grade point average dropped a full percentage that year . . . I dropped from 5.64 to 4.3, a significant drop.

For Kenzie, the relationships she formed in her first year at university contributed to her experience of dislocation, from self and from all that was familiar:

So there was about maybe a period of a year where I kind of really started to go downhill. I made some friends here because, you know, friends. I had friends like back in Alberta that I'd had my whole life and then I didn't have any friends at all and I just kind of latched onto the first people that I met and made them into my friends. But they were kind of, they weren't the best friends. They weren't bad people. They were just like you know, had a different mindset and they were kind of more into the partying and the drinking and that kind of stuff. And though I didn't, I didn't become completely like a party drinking person, I kind of started going out late on school nights and, because my friends would invite me out at

like 11:30 at night for like ice cream or whatever and I would be so lonely that I didn't want to say no even though I had to go to school the next day. And then I started to sabotage myself, like my higher goals, for this deep need to fit in and have some sort of like companionship in this loneliness that I felt.

Kenzie's boyfriend influenced her greatly:

I'm dating this guy who's a negative influence and who, of course I'm vulnerable, I'm very much wanting to please him so I'm going along with all these, whatever he wants to do. [big exhale] And so yeah, that's a hard year. First year university. I get really confused. I'm like what am I doing? Maybe I don't really want to do this. I don't know. Maybe, am I just going to university because my parents want me to? I just like, should I just go do something else? I don't know. Maybe I can't do this; university's so hard.

Julia spoke of her relationship with her boyfriend of three-and-a-half years and how it complicated her learning about "her" truth:

Though the truth . . . you're trying to figure out, you realize I guess when you come to university and there's so many ways of thinking you really have to come up with the truth for yourself and one way to do that is you get latched onto the guy and then take what, it's easier to accept what he accepts is truth and then it's not, it's not as hard to figure out what you believe in, you know, what's right and what's wrong. You know, you just become a bit of a chameleon and just kind of go along and that becomes part of your identity. And then maybe I'm totally wrong but it seems with my experience I kind of started just believing some of the things he believed or trying to believe what he believes or thinking that it's right,

but then for me, [describing the catalyst for ending the relationship] like for him to just step out and do something that I, that he knows I could never accept as right, yeah, then it does make it where you have to realize, well that's maybe your truth and this is my truth and they're not, it's not, they're not wrong, but they're not compatible.

### **Managing Relationships (Friends and Social Networks)**

Some of Julia's self-learning during her experience of her life-threatening illness centered on her relationships with friends:

I was just really impressed at how frail some relationships were and how strong others were.

Some friends disappeared while others showed up and never stopped. Julia spoke of her learning to recognize those differences. Julia had to let go of some relationships that were built around her self image as a "high achiever:"

In a way I'm kind of lucky because I experienced that [illness]. I have fewer people that I generally call friends. I split them now into close friends and acquaintances. I learned about the people who came to visit me multiple times despite the fact that they were busy and were dealing with things. And the people who didn't call for six months. I learned about who it was more of a convenience to be friends with me.

For Kenzie, the most important aspect of her experience of *disorientation* involved losing her job, the first experience of personal failure she had had with school or work. Working in a summer job as an unskilled labourer, Kenzie had lots of time to think about what she had been through and what she wanted to get back. Within her difficult process of

reflection, however, Kenzie ended her relationship, changed friend groups and made other changes all at the same time:

And second year was just like day and night. I went to school and I broke up with that guy. And that was a really good thing to do. And I was just like, no, I was like, I kind of laid down, kind of like, no, these are my values, these are your values. and they're way over here. And they're not ever going to be, they're not ever going to fit.

A number of those difficult transition experiences involved relationship as a site of *reorientation*, finding community and trusting that there was “a place” for them at university. Finding people, even one other person, with whom they could share their experience was a critical aspect of their adjustment to life at university.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of reorientation as a process is that *it is not necessarily growthful*, or what Dewey (1938) described as “educative” experience. A small percentage of the participants revealed that they did not feel enriched or had benefitted from their experience; rather, they coped and continued:

Jonathon, whose relationship ended between third and fourth year, focussed his coping outside of the university. There was a cost for that:

I don't have a relationship with any of my professors, particularly. I'm not the best student now. I got burnt out, feels like. (When did you notice that?) Beginning of last year. That relationship I'd been in dissolved over the last summer before my third year. I'm a musician as well. I was in a band and got really busy over the course of the summer. I maintained that level of busyness until the beginning of November. So I was distracted on two major fronts and let it slide . . . one fed into

the other. I used the band as a coping mechanism. . . .it was really easy to forget about the issues I was working through as a result of the break up of that relationship. . . . I was doing what I needed to do to maintain my grades.

What students experienced in the way of support, opportunities for reflection, or trying new ways of engaging as part of their experience of *reorientation* appeared to have a major effect on their attitude toward their education. The ability or inclination to reach out and develop new relationships points to a related theme I will expand on later in this chapter in: *Approaches to Participation*.

Nansi knew herself as a social person. During her difficult adjustment to university, she found one very good friend who has been her roommate throughout university:

One of my best friends, she was from Salmon Arm, that's another small town. She was in the same boat and it was hard because she didn't know anyone either. We would kind of sit together and talk about family and talk about our friends and how we missed it.

She eventually found other people to connect to and to chat with, which eased the transition:

The people I met then, because I'm a very social person as it is. And so, I just kind of let go of that fear of the big city, the fear of being alone, the fear of being away from my family and my friends, of being alone, of being in this strange place, and kind of just let loose basically. And started meeting people in the cafeteria, started meeting people in my classroom. The more and more people I met the more and more comfortable I got.

Anita, on the other hand, came to recognize that a few close friends who shared her interests and values were worth more to her than the large social network she had imagined she'd find. "I asked if your expectations had been met and how. If they haven't been met, how would you say you've modified them?"

One thing is definitely that, my idea of friends and stuff. Oh, well, if you can count your good friends on one hand, you're lucky. Whatever, but now I understand that more. It's like, well, I feel bad if people are engaging in young people activities. I don't want to. I feel like not part of university life because I could care less about a pub crawl. It's the last thing I'd like to do on a weekend. I'd rather just to out to see a movie. That kind of was part of my expectations. Getting a huge social network. That didn't happen really. But I have a few good friends. My best friend that I met in first year is my best friend. We're so close and that means so much more to me than 60 people to go to the bar with.

Heidi, whose first significant relationship had ended so abruptly in her first semester at university, spoke of how she reoriented to life in higher education and her pride in that accomplishment:

Everything worked out, it was fine in the end. I cut him completely out. I couldn't have him just as a friend. So as soon as I cut that and concentrated more on my friends and making other relationships on campus. Yeah. It was hard. It was probably the hardest thing I've ever experienced. But to know that I got through it is probably the best thing.

Heidi went on to describe the importance of relationships in the evolution of her sense of self while at university:

A lot of who I am now, I think, or, what I've evolved to be, I guess, has been through relationships and professional experiences. So, when my boyfriend and I had broken up, that was a huge year for me to experience what first years do about making new friends and I still have a lot of those friends from that first year, so they've stuck by my side this whole time. So, it's really good to have strong friendships like that.

### **Approaches to Learning: Interpersonal or Impersonal**

For all of the participants, relationships contributed the essential foundation for their well-being, helping to create conditions of “relaxed alertness,” or what Caine and Caine (1994) and Caine, Caine, McClintic, and Klimek (2005) described as the optimal conditions for meaningful learning. However, there appeared to be differences among participants in their approach to learning. For some participants, relationships with peers and instructors were necessary and part of their preferred orientation to learning, whereas for others, challenge and certainty in the context of academic fairness was more important than exposure to difference and peer relationships. Baxter-Magolda (2001) noted these patterns in her extensive longitudinal narrative study of self-authorship in post-secondary students. While Baxter-Magolda did not claim transferability of her findings, the stories narrated by this study's participants did illustrate some areas of congruence. The participants showed two clear patterns in their approach to learning.

#### **Interpersonal learners.**

*Interpersonal pattern learners* (Baxter-Magolda, 2001) “care about their peers’ perspectives, want to know their peers, and want their instructors to care about them. Relationships are central to the learning process because knowing others promotes

sharing perspectives and sharing perspectives promotes adding to one's knowledge" (p. 31). The majority of participants showed evidence of an interpersonal approach to learning.

David was the most articulate in his approach to and value for interpersonal learning:

I realized along the way that university is about getting through things together with other people. And by that I'm not implying copy, not in the sense that administration like, you know what I mean though . . . (plagiarism?) not plagiarism and all that, but it is all about the moral support.

In some instances the greater value for David was in the process of coming together to meet a challenge, rather than the content of the learning exercise:

You grow so much closer to people. You actually become really meaningful friends of people you met along the way. And you remember these kinds of things so much more than what you supposedly learn in these classes. I'm always going to remember the time that we had you know trying to cram for this one test. We were trying to do this one assignment, staying up until the small hours of the morning, doing these kinds of things, that's what I remember as the experience of it itself, not so much of what we were actually doing.

In other instances, though, David was very clear about the importance of engaging with his peers in the learning process:

And what I find is especially in study groups, just time that's outside of the class, I find that in having conversation with classmates, in actually being able to

bounce concepts back and forth between people, that's actually where the active learning begins to occur.

In hindsight, David attributes some of his need for active interpersonal engagement to his decision to leave the Sciences:

I find that very much in the sense that, for what I've seen, especially in the science classroom, learning consists of you sitting there while you're fed information, taking the information and assimilating that information. That's done in a way, where it's professor directing this kind of (It's what we call transmission.) Yeah. There you go. It's transmission of information . . . and I find that the ones that I gained significantly from were the ones where I was actually able to be a person as a member of a group and to be able to teach others what I thought about something as well and I found that was such a good way to reinforce my own learning, was to be able to take information that I'm receiving from a professor, to synthesize something in my head, and to rebroadcast that out to somebody else because in rebroadcasting it, it strengthens my own understanding of the topic and the subject matter. So, and I found that was a really critical thing and there wasn't really much of an opportunity for that to happen in a [science] classroom. Especially in science labs where your objective is to go in and make a chemical compound or to analyze something or to draw something.

By contrast, David found that learning from and with "different others" in his interdisciplinary classes gave him a different learning opportunity:

I find that people [in cross- or multi-disciplinary classes] are a lot more open to other ideas. People are willing to accept alternate theories and alternate

explanations to things to, so to speak, tell the story in two different languages . . .

I find that to invite other disciplines and perspectives and to give you a far greater understanding of the thing because you are hearing a story in another language.

You are opening your eyes and ears to that other perspective. And I think that has been a very important part of my educational experience, is the ability to have, or, I think it's a gift, to be able to hear other perspectives on it instead of just your own, or the one that you're used to hearing.

For interpersonal learners, relationships with professors were also important. Knowing the professor, respecting their knowledge, and sharing interests and values with them were reflected as important qualities in the student–professor relationship. For some of the participants, their relationships had had a mentoring quality. Also significant was feeling recognized and valued by the professor:

Heidi said:

He was so passionate about what he taught and really knowledgeable, really kind and understanding and I took a 400 level with him so we got to know each other a little more and he really recognized my work ethic and how hard I tried. And recognized that I was a good student. And I haven't had that since high school, where the teacher really knows you and your capabilities . . . I chose my 400 [level course] to be with him because I enjoyed my first class with him so much. Where the classes are smaller. We would have discussions. He's into health promotion and that's where my interest lies so we'd have general discussions about it. Because at the time I didn't know what I wanted to do and he helped me kind of explore options in the field.

When asked to elaborate on those qualities she was drawn to, Heidi pointed to interpersonal qualities that reflected her own values for being a good person, being honest, dependable, responsible and kind [see Heidi's Story, Appendix I]:

He was so nice . . . . He thanked us every class. And he always had a big smile.

And took a lot of pride in his work that he would present in class, or models, show enthusiasm for that. He was just wise and knowledgeable.

Julia spoke of the importance of relationship with her professors as part of her illness, but also related that she had just delivered a thank-you card to a professor she had had four years earlier in a first-year poetry course:

He was totally shocked: "I had you four years ago." Yeah. Anyways, um, no, he was great and I remember talking to him [four years earlier] and he said, and he said, good for you, good for you if you feel that you like science and you feel like you can do science, but you can do English and you seem to like English, so, keep that in mind. And I never did actually go fully into English, but I did switch from science to something more language based . . . (He acknowledged your gifts?)

And that's really great for a prof to do that, especially so early in my degree.

Because he, I remember writing his final exam and I finished early and so there were a lot of people writing, and he handed back a final essay. And he's quite eccentric, very cool but very eccentric, and he just yelled in his British accent, "You're bloody brilliant!" And I absolutely couldn't believe that he said that, because everyone's in the middle of an exam and they look up and he, I know that's kind of, I don't know, egotistical to think that, but it just was so great . . . I really respected him as someone I really respected, to show me respect like that,

and to make comments on my paper . . . and that really stuck with me. Like that for me that's, if I need motivation, I can just think, like he, there's someone who, you think these profs are big and scary and they have all this education and they, they think you're so stupid, you know, they have all this education in their specific field and you go to take an introductory course and for him to actually say that, I mean, I'm sure there are a ton of things that are better, but considering the introductory course and I was in first year, it was pretty good, and it was really nice to be seen that way.

### **Impersonal learners.**

By contrast, two of the participants reflected a different approach to learning. Baxter-Magolda (2001) used the term *impersonal pattern knowers* to describe an orientation that valued challenge over caring. For these students, Baxter-Magolda described a preference for being forced to think, preferring to exchange views with instructors and peers through debate, expecting to be challenged by instructors in a context of fair, practical evaluation, and resolving certainty by logic and research (p. 31). The role of peers in learning showed up less frequently in their interviews and seldom in the context of learning from their participation, but could be highly valued if they respected those peers. Respecting the knowledge and expertise of the professor and feeling *challenged* to participate to that level was often a motivator for hard work. Jonathon spoke of this in reference to one of his professors:

There was a sense going into it that this was going to be a difficult course. The teacher made it very clear that this was not for the squeamish . . . . Even though he didn't care, he did everything possible to make it clear to you that he didn't care

whether or not you did or didn't do well. He did [care]. You could tell. Complete mastery. Compared to what we knew, he had complete mastery of the subject . . . . I wanted to impress him. It felt like he wanted us to know this stuff. That it was important. Otherwise he wouldn't be teaching the course sort of thing.

Jerry also valued the professors he could respect:

Part of it is that he is knowledgeable and also that, there's a way that he has of being able to speak and making it colloquial enough that it's a lecture you can understand and it's engaging, but also of making you respect him even though his speech is rather colloquial.

Another professor Jerry respected he credited with challenging him to change the only political opinion he acknowledged changing during his undergraduate education:

That was sort of a course which probably changed one of the only political views that I've ever changed in a university class.

Jerry described his love of a certain kind of debate:

Formulating an argument, being iconoclastic. I love to raise shit. When I was in a Quebec [history] class last year; like I said I was interested in Duplessis. Of course, he's commonly vilified as this arch conservative, this evil, evil man. And I started raising these interesting inconvenient little questions. Like I said, "Here's a guy who balanced the budget, who slightly cut taxes, who's a big friend of agriculture, who started government intervention programs, like rural electrification," and I said, "This is Tommy Douglas. This is a great socialist hero." And there were a couple of NDP activists who didn't quite like that comparison and I just thought, Oh, I am such a bastard. And I got like fantastic

marks for this. The prof was saying, “Well, you’re raising some really good questions when you say this.”

### **Trajectory: Seeking and Finding Fit—Discipline, Program Fit, and Career**

The students who participated in this study had all chosen a major or program and completed most or all of the requirements of their degree programs at the time of the interviews. They all expressed a sense of strong interest (or stronger than they had experienced in other courses or disciplines) in their chosen degree program. They varied greatly in their perception of the contribution of that degree to their current thoughts about a career path. What varied greatly among them, however, was their path to choosing their particular degree program. Of the twelve participants, seven had changed their program or major, some by adding a minor or creating a double major, others by changing faculties or programs. What was shared by those who changed their programs was a desire for a degree program that better fitted their learning styles, their personalities, and their interests. Several factors complicated their early decision-making on the program or degree: perceptions of parental expectations and a desire to please were some.

Pami, the international student in the study, acknowledged early that she felt conflicted when registering for her first-year courses:

Everybody in [my home country], they’re either doing a business degree or engineering or somewhere in the sciences, not a lot in the arts. But I know that the majority of students take business classes. So when I came to university I had in mind I did the IB [International Baccalaureate] diploma in high school and I excelled in all of them but two courses that I really enjoyed were psychology and

business. Business is more like I just kind of got an award for it but I never really had an interest in it. But I really had an interest in psychology. So when I came here I thought well, I can't do anything with a psychology degree but I can do something with business. So in first year I kind of just focused on doing business. I had my courses all set up and I think it's because I didn't want to disappoint my parents where I thought that doing the business was the right thing to do . . . . But it was good because I decided on my own that this isn't what I really wanted to do and my boyfriend actually told me and asked me what did you want to do and I said I really like psychology. I did really well and I always wanted to learn more about it. So I just changed all my courses and did the psychology degree instead . . . . I think taking business was because I had this assumption that if I was going to excel I had to excel financially or career wise and in the future it would be in business and I thought that was the best thing to do because my parents didn't know anything about psychology. But I chose psychology and when I told them they said, great, yeah, that's wonderful.

Sharon spoke of a struggle knowing which degree to pursue and the challenge of choosing courses that kept her options open:

First year, when I first entered UVic it was a really big toss up between business and sciences for me. So I made it even more difficult for myself by taking courses that would work for both. So instead of doing Math 102 which I needed for business, which would have been so much easier, I took Math 100, Calculus, so hard.

In the end, an interest in chemistry was not enough; other program requirements made the prospect too onerous and one negative class experience was enough:

Because uhh, it was a weird deciding factor, I was going to do, thinking about a science degree, cuz I loved chemistry, but I realized I can't just do chemistry I have to do these sciences, so I took a biology class and first of all, really didn't like the prof and just really didn't like the class at all and that was honestly a deciding factor.

David's process of decision-making for his first-year courses reflected his experience of parental expectations:

By that, they [David's parents] implied, "Don't take a degree that's going to get you nowhere." It's funny because, this is, I'm speaking their train of thought. They believed that you need to take a degree that can get you a good job, basically. And I mean I think we've heard of that before. And basically they were saying, please get a BSc, or a Bachelor of Engineering, or some kind of a degree like that. If you can, go and get a law degree, like things like that basically. And they say, at a minimum, get a science degree, do not become an arts student. And I was told that from the very beginning . . . . It was pretty much geared that way from the start and then I got here and it's funny because I just really wasn't into it. Like I did fine. Like I did well enough, like I studied . . . hard enough to get by. They weren't spectacular marks but you know, I got by first year. Second year, second year was a struggle because I took so much stuff that's required that I hated with a passion. And I actually ended up failing two classes in second year.

Students showed variability in how long they persisted in a discipline they didn't enjoy. David acknowledged that he saw himself as a hard worker, but also that he was aiming for pre-med because it would probably lead to a more financially lucrative career that his parents valued. It took the experience of biochemistry to convince him he couldn't "survive" that way of learning.

For a while I thought I was going to do Biochemistry. Then second year hit. I had to take it. Wow. Are you kidding me? If this is what biochemistry is, I never want to see it again. In my life . . . obviously the underlying principles of biochemistry are very important to the biological and ecological world, but it's not my area of interest. And I realized that after experiencing like, you want me to memorize how many hundreds of pages of notes? I mean I'm okay at memorizing, but, no, I'm not into this at all.

David thinks his values have evolved from what he learned in his family, but says he sees his parents' values shifting:

Whereas they used to tell me you should go and get as big of a pay cheque as you can, there is a point now after seeing that I've worked pretty hard at all this that, go get a job one day that interests you but don't work yourself to the point where you're going to kill yourself to get that job. Because even they are coming to the realization that, I mean, they're entering their 50s, they're still pretty young, but they're like you know, my mom's still mid 40s but my dad's 50 this year I think and he says he's starting to slow down with work which is kind of a funny statement coming from him but I mean he went through, he had a job before that was a very politically charged kind of career and he actually stepped away from it

and picked another; it was related, it was still in civil engineering but he didn't have to put with nearly as much in the way of politics.

David noted:

The big, like, the big moral of the story is that failure and release is required before you can actually grow. You need to release all the inherited inflexibilities and rigidities in the system before you can actually start up a new system that can be, not a new system, but before you can advance the system into a next stage that can ultimately be more resilient and be stronger. I think that was the same way too and my experience was that I needed to get rid of a lot of things that I came here with. I needed to shed a lot of the old values that I had—the value that I was going to be a doctor regardless whether I hated it or not. That was gone, that became something totally different. It was: I want to do something that I'm going to enjoy.

Jennifer said:

When I went in, I wanted to be a neurosurgeon. I was fully gung ho. Since then I've changed my mind. My grades meant a lot. Just being able to savour the experience and not trying to get through everything so quickly. That meant a lot to me. So I dropped it down to four [courses] in the second term of my first year. I realized I was not passionate about any of the sciences that I studied so my sister suggested I take psychology in the summer. And that's when I realized what I was passionate about. I took the condensed courses—you do the course in three-and-a-half weeks, which means you read a chapter a night. Which means you spend hours a night reading psychology. (A very intense learning experience.) I loved

that. I loved the material and it fit my learning style. The whole thing just came together. And I totally loved it. And I did very well.

Kenzie said:

What I did in second year was I switched my major. Because the writing thing was I thought I wanted to do writing. I got great marks in English class and I love writing. And of course I still do. I'm still a writer. But it was just like I wasn't in the right head space for it. It was just, it just wasn't working for me at this time. And then I switched into visual arts. Because I found that the—I was taking two options in the visual arts, a drawing course and another course. And I found that I was liking those two courses more than any of my other courses. And art had been a passion for me too in high school, probably equally, and it was like, I want to switch into visual arts and be in this art world. And then that worked for me.

### **Approaches to Participation in Community**

In attempting to understand students' varying approaches to participating in community at university, I found Wenger's (1998) sociological approach to community membership most helpful. Wenger (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) described learning as a social process which is relevant to this project not as a preferable or superior theory to other, more psychologically or educationally oriented theories of learning (Piaget et al., 1977; Belenky et al., 1986; Steffe & Gale, 1995). Rather, it describes an "encompassing process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities" (Wenger, 1998, p. 4). The participants in this study embodied a mutually defining process that shaped not only what they did, but also who they were and how they interpreted what they did (Wenger, 1998).

What varied among them were the ways in which they oriented toward their participation in community.

Wenger (1998) described three broad categories of participation in communities of practice: full, peripheral and non-participation. Full participation implies knowledge, status, and engagement in a community of practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) originally used the term “legitimate peripheral participation” to describe the process of apprenticeship in which a community of practice included master craftsmen and apprentices. In a university community, students could be described as knowledge apprentices; however, in a community as complex as a university, there are also sub-groupings in the community. In his second book, Wenger (1998) elucidated the concept of identity as comprising forms of non-participation. He stated, “What we are not can . . . become a large part of how we define ourselves” (p. 164). The terms can be applied to student engagement—to the strategies, interactions, resources, and activities used by students to participate in a “regime of competence” (Wenger, 1998, pp. 136-7). By naming the practices by which a community defines competent participation, acts of learning and discovery can be acts of competent participation. However, in a community where membership is defined by contrasting, for example, student versus faculty, “non-participation becomes a defining constituent of participation” (p. 168). None of the participants in this study could be described as being non-participants. However, many of them had experiences of non-participation that created a tension in their identity development process.

### **Full participation.**

By the end of their undergraduate studies, several of the participants in this project experienced themselves as full participants in their learning communities.

Rosa: At the moment I'm in my greatest strength where I'm just out there, really involved and loving it . . . and action, yeah, like definitely, if I want to do something, I can make it happen, and it feels good. Just a little while ago we had a Relay for Life event here and I thought to myself, I did the Times Colonist, I've always wanted to do an event like that. And I got friends together, we made a team and got friends together, we did it and it was terrific and it just keeps motivating me. You know, just the whole action, wanting to do something, putting it together, not being afraid to be the one encouraging others to do it. Actually taking the step and being like: here you go, try this with me.

Kenzie: Yeah, that [coop] job was so important to me and it like just really gave me the confidence to be like, yeah, I can do this. I can be an adult. I can actually be an awesome adult. And I can do whatever I want. And I can let school be a passion, I can get better marks in third year. My marks went up every year and this summer I'm just on top of the world. I've got an[other] awesome [Coop] job, I'm doing architectural walking tours of Victoria . . . I'm so confident and I had some great experiences in third year that really helped me figure out what I was doing.

### **Peripheral participation.**

Peripheral participation may or may not imply a trajectory toward full participation depending on the motivation of the individual. For Rosa, the decision to change her disengaged behaviour came about after a long period of “killing time on the

computer,” a “long-distance relationship” and a lot of “avoidance.” Rosa stated that she had never been a strong student academically [C’s and B’s in high school] but the qualitative difference of her experience centred in her extra-curricular involvement in student-leadership activities in her school community. When she started to get involved in similar kinds of programs at UVic, adding the Intercultural Education and Training Diploma to her psychology degree, then joining Peer Helping and the Student Leadership Program, Rosa began to reconnect with the level of personal fulfillment she had been missing since high school.

For other participants in this study, participation was peripheral due to other factors such as conflicting priorities for Katie, for whom graduating without debt was so important that she chose to work two jobs while taking full-time courses. Her primary community participation outside of class assignments and studying was through her job on campus, where she had contact with other part-time student staff. For Jonathon, his music was very important and served to engage his attention and creative energy, but Jonathon acknowledged that he had a *lifelong* pattern of peripheral participation, feeling like he could not, or did not want to buy in to the “regime of competence” demanded by any community of practice. Like Jerry, he chose a peripheral position as part of a personal strategy.

I don’t how much this pertains to my academic career; it might, it might actually have a great bearing on it, but, uh, I never necessarily feel like I belong anywhere. (Really?) Yup, ever. I played sports and I played hockey all the way from grade . . . five years old until I was about 17, 17 or 18, never felt fully integrated into the social aspect of it, not. You know, I had friends who played hockey and I had

close friends who played and continued to play after I left but I never really . . . (But you weren't really part of that whole hockey culture?) Yeah, I was never really part of the culture. I was in theatre, in the early part of high school, which didn't help me anymore, because that was an all geek culture I'll tell you that much. But again . . . uh, which, you know, and then, I was the outsider in the drama department as well because I wasn't dramatic enough or whatever. I didn't fit the stereotype or whatever that was, um, had record non-attendance in high school. Managed to be the valedictorian for some reason. You know, I was always like, the favourite and the most hated if you like, institutionally. With teachers. They were always . . . like I would cause the most problems, but they seemed to like me the most. Talk about contradictory.

For Jerry, peripheral participation was related to a history of feeling like an individualist and a contrarian, combined with a belief that this degree was a way station, about further refinement, but not much growth:

You're supposed to be able to write and critically think; that should just be expected of citizens. So in this case this [degree] is just a four-year make-work project.

While both Katie and Jonathon expressed some regret that they had been marginally engaged on campus and some disappointment that their undergraduate experience had not been more fulfilling, both would be described as successful students in institutional terms. Jerry related that he had gone through a period of questioning his choice not to travel and experience the language and culture of France [French is his minor], when many of his friends and acquaintances were working, saving and travelling

to “find themselves.” Jerry said he saw the absence of that kind of experience as evidence of class struggle and his questioning as evidence of his own “inferiority complex.”

And I sort of realized first of all that I was allowing myself to be peer pressured in God knows how long. But also that a lot of people I find when I started looking at it are doing it because they didn't have any clue as to what they wanted to do with their lives. So this was just an excuse to waste time. But they'd do it under the pretext of finding themselves in a year and whatever the hell they wanted to call it. And I sort of realized well, you know, I'm just letting myself get sucked in.

That's sort of a reaffirmation of the sort of individualism that I started out with. If that makes sense.

All three of these students could identify friends or partners as important relationships but their participation in those relationships seemed disconnected from their engagement with the university community.

### **Sources of Engagement: The Curriculum and the Co-curriculum**

Part of my research curiosity in this study centred on what constituted the most powerful learning experiences students identified in the course of their undergraduate education. I wanted to understand what students would describe as their change process, what they noticed in themselves, what they valued in their learning, and what meaning they made in their self-assessments. What I heard over and over was that the most powerful learning for these students occurred outside of the classroom. That is not to say that participants did not value or enjoy their classroom experiences. In fact, every participant could identify at least one course or professor they enjoyed, respected, or felt they had learned the most from. Nor did it mean that powerful learning was unrelated to

academic curriculum; rather, what participants described as life changing and transformative (Mezirow, 1991) were *experiences*, curricular and co-curricular, that challenged their worldviews and unexamined assumptions, and required them to engage in multiple learning domains: cognitive, affective, and social.

Sharon, as a student in a mandatory coop program in her business degree, participated in numerous international coop terms. She described the most powerful of these as her most recent internship experience, where she had spent several months in Hong Kong, tutoring two children in a Chinese family:

Hong Kong was such a life-changing experience for me because when I try to talk to people about it now it just gets frustrating for me because they can't and they don't get what it was like for me . . . . I was so nervous when I first went over there. I didn't know how to act, what was appropriate to say and what wasn't. The first couple of times I went [to their home] I was rigid. The girl was quite shy. But soon I realized that laughing and having a good sense of humour comes with every culture. I made them laugh quite a lot. I would do a few things that made myself look like a dork. If they remembered the meaning of a word I'd get up and do a dance. And they loved it. And I got Carli right out of her shyness boundary and she really started to come forward and started to talk and talk and talk. Her mother said, "I've never seen her like this" . . . and their English improved tremendously as well. We read and did grammar and had conversations with them.

These experiences helped Sharon to learn:

The greatest influence I can make in other people's lives the happier I'll be . . . I love being with people. It's one of my natural skills that I can give of myself. I put that out there. I also used to teach swimming lessons. I would go from having kids who were afraid to put their face in the water, to doing the front crawl. I was so proud of those kids.

Heidi spoke of her relationships and her professional experiences as contributing greatly to her sense of self, but she also identified as significant taking time off school to earn money and then to take a trip to Europe. She clearly identified herself as feeling different when she returned—more independent and “aligned with” herself. She could also see how she engaged differently:

Having taken that semester off, something happened and I was in the library all the time and studying and not partying with my friends. Something had changed in that one year where I thought, wow, I must have matured a lot . . . I was content just sitting in my room, alone, on a Friday night, which is unheard of in Res.

Pami has aspirations to contribute to positive change in her country. By seeking out role models and mentors early on in her undergraduate experience, Pami was able to develop support networks that contributed to her successful adjustment to learning in a culture and language different from her own. Through her participation in a co-curricular program (Peer Helping Program), Pami made many friends. She spoke of the significance of the staff coordinator of that program, who modelled a way of attending and communicating with people that Pami was very drawn to; she recognized in that modelling a way to help her adapt to her new community:

I saw that whenever Tricia talked to somebody she would really have a way of being in the moment, of tuning in with that person. I really admired that. I never had an interaction with her where I was thinking merely, just looking at her from an outside point of view. I really wanted to be like her. When I'm starting off in university I thought this is what I should be.

Rosa, when asked about what she learned about her strengths, skills, beliefs, or values as part of her academic learning, clarified whether or not I would consider peer helping as academic. I responded that I wanted her to talk about where her learning happened:

Just before the peer helping, I felt for a long time that helping people in a genuine way full of care and compassion was what I was about. But when I got into the peer-helping program and acted on it, that's when I crystallized it in myself. It's just like confirming something. It fit me. And then I'm like okay, this is something, cause I'm actually doing it now, it's not just a thought. I'm putting it into action.

Nansi's references to her most powerful learning related most to experiences of reflecting on culture, race or ethnicity. She described a field trip in a First Nations history course that sparked a realization about her own culture and the role of language:

It was a field trip, a day trip, and there we were in one of the big longhouses and one of the elders was talking to us and they were talking about valuing one's culture and because you know they're, First Nations are going through such a struggle because a lot of their culture has been lost. She was just talking to us about how we should all value our culture and hold to our family's language

because language is what makes up the culture and what keeps it alive . . . she was, you know, not just necessarily just talking about herself but she was telling us how we should be valuing our culture and how we should be keeping it alive and rich and you know, um, healthy, that's what she said. I sat there and I thought, yeah, no, you know, we should and I should and so I think that was something that was really, really, um, inspiring for me and especially being there and listening to her as an elder speaking . . . . I came back to Victoria and I was actually seeing my dad that night and I was talking to him and sometimes I express myself in English because I can express myself a lot better in English than in Punjabi . . . and I said, Dad, don't let me speak English when I'm around you, let me speak Punjabi. I don't want this, I don't want the language to die, I'm like, he's like what are you talking about? I'm like well, you know, and I explained it to him how much language is the essence of a culture, like I don't want to lose it because I want to teach it to my children.

Nansi spoke of the contribution of her experience as an RA to her sense of confidence in being able to handle challenging situations:

I learned so much because it was so hands-on, both the training that we were given, things that I will take with me for the rest of my life, and things that at such a young age that I had to deal with. Like one of my residents was in a domestic, like an abusive relationship, so I had to deal with the domestic violence, and like the fear that the girls on my floor felt when her boyfriend came to the building. Or dealing with like suicidal thoughts that residents have had. But that job just made me realize just not only made me realize but made me, made me, actually I was

very proud of myself, I'm not going to lie, like finishing that job and just completing it successfully and having such a great year, hard but great. Just being so proud for myself, and just basically giving myself a pat on the back because the amount of stuff that we dealt with as RAs is unbelievable.

### **Epistemology and Ontology: Contextual Knowing and Transitional Feeling**

Baxter-Magolda (1999) described the cognitive maturity required to view knowledge as *contextual*, as the ability to recognize that multiple perspectives exist, and “the capacity to participate in constructing, evaluating and interpreting judgments in light of available evidence and frames of reference” (p. 9). Contextual knowers show evidence of recognizing the importance of expert knowledge and using evidence for taking a stance; however, there is also evidence of appreciation for “working through their own perspectives by accessing their own experience and others’ perspectives” (p. 51). All the participants in this study showed evidence of contextual knowing.

Pami: I think I'm not as narrow minded as I used to be. I think outside the box.

Sometimes when I come across a problem, but I come across a problem where I have to analyze this test that someone's doing, this test and they have an impairment but in what kind of process are they impaired in? Before I came to university I would get bogged down in the details because this is characteristic of this impairment versus the other one. But now I look, okay well, it doesn't make sense. I have to look at it in another way and see that there's maybe a combination of things. I learn more to accept that there are many explanations to some things. Before I would just take things at face value.

Heidi, who stated that her close friendships developed at university were an important aspect of her learning and coping, described their influence on her thinking:

They're, some of them are like me, some of them are not like me. It's interesting being with friends and people who aren't exactly like you. People who have recreational sex. I don't get that. But to get their perspective or their lifestyle is interesting. It's being tuned to the world through different peoples and lifestyles . . . . Something you may look down on but not now because they're your friends. It's simple. We had this huge discussion . . . about race, and how to talk about it; they're meaningful conversations as well, not just about clothing and shopping and stuff. Real-life conversations.

She contrasts these conversations with discussions she has had with others "from home:"

I don't get that a lot with the friends at home. They're just different conversations at university. It's good to have those conversations with them . . . . My friends here can be open with opinions without imposing them; whereas I find that back home there are some people who are very closed minded. They have their opinions and that's it. They just rant about it. At university it's more about ideas. The friends here—that's the stuff we're looking for and respect for each other.

Pami described the challenge of learning to reflect on her own thinking in critical reflection papers where she was challenged to express her own beliefs and assumptions:

I remember a course I took last semester was in theories of counselling. It was very hard for me to write a paper that was a reflection of my thinking. I didn't know how to write that. It was hard for me to write it on paper. I didn't really think about how I was thinking. My first paper came out bad for my standards.

But I thought that it was a bad reflection on me. But after my process each time—I did about five papers—and I progressed through each paper. The more I think about the way I'm thinking, the more clear I am about what kind of assumptions I'm working on. When I explore my beliefs and my values and assumptions that are underlying my thinking and how these influence me, that was a very good activity for me.

The challenge of critical reflection was described as valued by most participants.

Nansi: I dreaded the assignments because they were so hard and they were so analytical and it was very, very difficult, but I loved the context (a course on race and ethnicity). Like I . . . there were difficult papers because they, they made you think. It wasn't one of those research papers that you can, you know, read about it and kind of like form your argument and you're done. These ones you had to read these articles and form an argument but it was more personal, it was what **you** believed in and you had to like support it with evidence from the articles. But it was really difficult because it would take me forever to write, and they were only four or five pages long.

The ability to recognize subjectivity, to understand that one interprets and engages in the world based on one's knowledge, culture, and lived experience was revealed by some participants.

Anita: It's like I have definitely a lens that I view the world out of and like I wouldn't have realized, I guess I knew that but I didn't really realize it so much before where, it's like, whenever I'm going to sort of like help somebody, or if I'm going to try to you know guide them in a certain way I'm doing it from a place of like

my understanding, rather than theirs. And there are just some situations that I'll like never understand. Because I've never lived in a civil war, for example. You know so it's sort of important to understand that rather than having this global idea of like this is how to fix problems, this is how to, you're in . . . like so many NGOs, they're really like Westernized concepts that they take them to another place and try to like, seldom do they really work because they're just not contextually viable for the people who are living there. Like culturally viable. And so although they're intending to do very positive work, it's still not coming from a place like, they're not really recognizing their own sort of position, I guess. So I think that that's really important because there's some times you have to understand—well maybe I can't do this because maybe I don't really know where this fits in—is coming from.

While participants described some areas in which they felt confident stating what they knew and how they were different in their thinking now, they also noted that they were still in the process of learning how to manage gaps and tensions (Sawyer et al. 2003), creating discomfort that showed up as what I describe as *transitional feeling*. Perry (1999) described a sense of urgency that resulted from a combination of internal drive and external push in his “scheme” of development during the college years, (pp. 55-60). He was attempting to describe motivation or what I describe as “agency” or self-efficacy, that emerging sense of knowing oneself as capable of managing the process of commitment to a path in life.

The approaching transition from an undergraduate university program might contribute to a heightened sense of uncertainty, but it also serves to highlight the

destabilizing effect of uncertainty in the external environment of rapid, complex change. When participants spoke of their intellectual understanding, they described a new or emerging awareness that they needed to work at balancing this new learning about self as they engaged that “path” in their community:

Rosa: At the moment I'm in my greatest strength where I'm just out there, really involved and loving it but pacing myself because I know if I get too like, into it then it's easy to go [noise and hand gesture, sliding down].  
(What happens when you do the down part of it?) I just need to take a break. I'm doing too much and I'm getting overwhelmed and it's not about yeah I just back away, I just chill out and do my thing. I don't see myself in that place right now. What I was going to say was like I'm active and I'm doing things and I'm trying to keep it paced because I, in the back of my mind, no, in the front of my mind, I'm thinking like okay, I don't want to be in a spot where I am not doing anything at all because I am doing too much right now . . . . It all kind of balances.

Sharon: I always feel like I'm invincible. I can do anything in my 24-hour blocks that we call days. And I am only human. Like today, I'm just exhausted. I was up the mountain all weekend. I was in a crazy social situation because I was going up there with a guy who I've just started seeing two months ago. But it was so tiring. I was out of my comfort zone. And then we went snowboarding all day. We drove back down on Sunday and [he] dropped me off at my car. And then we ran 10 kilometres around Elk Lake. And we hadn't even had lunch. And last night I was exhausted. My best friend called and I didn't know what she was saying. And I was working on my business law. I don't know why Hong Kong did this to me, I

had to start over. I had to build my life . . . . Since I've been home I've dropped a few friends, I'm not in regular contact with them. That's simply because I spread myself too thin. I'm starting to prioritize as to what's important for me. I'm finding that I have more steam to do the things I want to do.

Sharon has big dreams to move to a larger city and become a land developer. She recognizes that she has difficulty balancing her passion for achievement and success with knowing her limits. She describes the process of finding that tipping point:

With everything I do I push myself to that very limit. It's not until I've crossed it that I look back and go, the line was actually over there. I'm too far this time.

Sharon is struggling to balance two conflicting values: becoming a successful business person (developing land and becoming financially successful) and helping people (contributing to their wellbeing and facilitating their learning). At this point, Sharon has not yet resolved the tension she feels between the values she absorbed in her family and her current career path. She expresses frustration that her father cannot see that she can be a good and socially responsible business woman:

Me and my dad are growing apart because he sees that as well, first he doesn't fully understand business. He only hears the bad part. He only sees it as a cut throat world. But it's—I think it's making us grow apart. He was the one that I always went out into nature with and did crazy trips and he's always the one who always had enough money to buy a brand new car but liked driving his old Toyota land cruiser, you know.

She recognizes the contradictions in her aspirations and acknowledges the stress of finding her way:

Because I also have just such a passion for the outdoors. I love, love the outdoors. Which seems kind of contradictory to someone wanting to develop that land, buy that land and turn it into a commercial building. Which is . . . (How do you carry those two parts of you in there?) maybe that's why I'm stressing out so much as I'm nearing graduation.

David expressed an awareness that some things were still very much in progress. He recognized a tension between two parts of himself—a more goal-directed, linear part, and a more expansive, creative part and he saw that being driven could interfere with both:

And for me I think that it's definitely something that's still in progress. I think that my shift between or not even necessarily between but the way that I look at things will always be changing. (When did you recognize that?) I'm going to have to say that probably came pretty recently, within the past year, I'd say. Like even having been enrolled in interdisciplinary studies, still I was and even just perspectives on life and everything, things were still very much: I have a mission, I'm going to try to go and accomplish it. And it's starting to become more apparent now that it's not so much maybe what you're trying to get at, the ultimate goal, maybe you should go focus on the journey a bit. And that's what I'm starting to realize as well, and even independent of academics, even in the way that I approach simple life things like how am I going to go and plan the next three months of my life right now, all the things I want to do? Because I want to go volunteer for this, go volunteer for that but I have to balance it with studying and all that. I have these objectives and goals but how am I going to approach them? And what I've been typically used to doing is well, have a timeline, blah

blah blah, and plan it all out, and wanting to have a very set way of doing something. And I think I'm starting to break away from that, to be more flexible. Learning to be flexible is a tremendously hard thing to do.

Anita spoke of uncertainty about her different ways of being in different contexts. She had come to know much more about herself and what she valued and strived to move toward in her career goals but she still believed, as David noted, that it should be a linear process:

Anita: I don't understand but I do, but I don't understand how I can make, how I can go backwards rather than forwards because usually people walk forwards in life and here I was [in high school], I was very confident and I was up there all the time and I came to university and it was ten steps back that I went. And I'm perceived in class to be very shy and I'm not a shy person. Like a lot of my professors think I'm very shy but when I go and introduce myself or go and talk to them during office hours it's like, same person? Because I go into class and I just freeze.

This led Anita to discuss one of her growth and learning challenges, that "comfort in her own skin" that she recognized she had not quite managed, contributed to a feeling of discomfort. There is always more work to be done:

And so that's another thing. And I think another thing that a lot of people struggle with is not caring what people think about you and not letting that dominate your life . . . . And not that I allow that too much but I think I do . . . for instance just like appearance, weight to me, [I'm] obsessed with it. Like, always. A lot of my friends are like, you're not fat, and I understand that but it's just, I don't know what it is, but it's just an obsession of mine. It's not that I'm you know, not

bulimic or anorexic but every time I eat, after I eat I'm like shouldn't have had that, you know what I mean? And it's just I'm so hard on myself and I think another thing is, again, confidence, right? You should be comfortable with yourself. And I think another thing that I would like to work on is not to care so much what people think, or not, try to not be that perfect, hokey, not White, but you know, just that ideal girl walking down the street.

While Anita has developed her understanding and appreciation for self and others, particularly through her studies in culture, race and ethnicity, and her love of the French language, she has not yet fully integrated that knowledge. Her feelings of discomfort, awareness of herself in different settings, not feeling okay with herself in her own skin, represent the gaps and tensions that point to the emergence of future learning. The sense of discomfort with aspects of oneself showed up in several participants. Heidi acknowledged she still has things to learn about managing her sense of balance:

It's true that at work I'm always wondering how much fun is too much fun. I have a problem with self-care and the time I do take for self-care whether it is actually good for me. I can say, this is my night off and I'm going to relax, but then I don't do anything relaxing, like I watch a stressful movie or stay up late, so it's not good. Really it's supposed to be time for recovering, but then I do things like eat junk food, really I should be doing meditation and going to bed early and eating healthy.

## **Emergence: Identity Development as Experiential Process or Processual Experience?**

This chapter has explored the themes that emerged from the collected stories of twelve university students nearing the completion of their undergraduate studies. As the themes emerged, my own thinking evolved. In the “foreword in wider perspective” to a reissue of Bateson’s (1980) *Mind and Nature*, Menghi (2002) spoke of our “responsiveness to the pattern which connects” (p. xii). As I struggled to make sense of what I heard and then saw as I drew diagrams, maps and charts to aid my understanding of components and relationships and processes, I kept returning to the phenomenon of uniqueness. Each person’s story was special, complex and full of elements that could not be predicted. However, there were patterns observable in the ways in which the disorienting experiences potentiated (but did not guarantee) emergence of an epistemologically and ontologically more complex way of seeing self and engaging with community. I needed to find a theoretical perspective(s) to account for patterns and uniqueness.

It happened that a group of colleagues and I were meeting to discuss a planned conference presentation on the development of our current group programming philosophy and structure in Counselling Services. As we looked back over several years, we were struck by the way in which our thinking and behaviours had evolved as we responded to a number of random events and circumstances. The word *emergence* was used to describe a process that was not externally planned in a linear fashion, but that we recognized as an “evolutionary response . . . to changes in the environment” (Goldstein, 1999).

Early in my doctoral work I was inspired by Dr. William Doll as he engaged his graduate students in reading and analyzing authors such as Bateson, Kauffman, Margolis, and Prigogine. I had deliberately chosen the word *emergent* in naming my research proposal, indicating my belief in the new understandings, skills and orientations to life, career and learning that evolved through the process of achieving an undergraduate degree in an institution of higher learning. Having sat with my data and now approaching the end of months of analysis and writing, I experienced an epiphany. Could what we were working to describe in our professional network be reflective of the individual self-learning experiences of the students in my study? I was galvanized into further reading and came upon a book entitled *Creativity and Development* (Sawyer et al., 2003). As part of a conversation among authors of that book, Sawyer noted, “There are many parallels between the social-systems views of creativity, on one hand, and socio-cultural perspectives in developmental psychology, on the other” (p. 12). Recent advances in systems thinking hold promise for interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the individual and social nexus in human development. In chapter 5, I will expand the subject to discuss the relevance of *emergence* to organizational development and individual identity development. The chapter will discuss possible implications and future directions for increasing knowledge and understanding the creative potential inherent in the process of identity development and organizational development in higher education.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has narrated the phenomenological analysis of the participants’ stories, including the interview data and their responses to the stories I created for each participant. I have identified and explained the patterns, themes and trajectories of the

stories that emerged. Throughout the chapter, the participants' voices were used to illuminate the discussion. I have explicated the "thick analytic" approach I used to assist in the process of analysis. Wherever possible, I related my experience of "hermeneutic circling" as I worked to remain critically self-aware.

## Chapter 5. Discussion and Implications

*The big, like, the big moral of the story is that failure and release is required before you can actually grow. You need to release all the inherited inflexibilities and rigidities in the system before you can actually start up a new system that can be, not a new system, but before you can advance the system into a next stage that can ultimately be more resilient and be stronger.*  
(David, Research Participant)

### Introduction

This narrative-phenomenological study has sought to increase understanding of how, in their encounters with curriculum, teachers, courses, relationships, and experiences, a self-selected group of students nearing graduation from a mid-sized western Canadian university are engaged in their own search for identity.

Chapter 4 explained the themes that emerged from the interview data using participants' words and experiences. This chapter will link those themes to the research questions: How do students learn about themselves as adults (individuals, citizens, members of communities, professionals, and contributors to society) in the process of learning the course content in their academic programs? How does the experience of university education influence students' self-learning in curricular and co-curricular settings? What do they see themselves having gained and honed through their academic experience as interests, skills and values? What is the relationship between that self-learning and the ways in which they apply their learning to the "real world" in their career development and engagement in the communities they inhabit?

Finally, I will make recommendations based on the findings of the study and clarify limitations and possibilities for further exploration. The chapter will end with some of the questions that have emerged for me in this learning enterprise.

As implied in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, transformation implies a breaking down and reorganization of the whole system (Gunderson & Holling, 2002). This chapter will suggest some ways in which chaos, complexity and non-linear dynamics contribute to a conceptual framework for student-identity development in the context of higher education. In doing so, I must acknowledge that, as a non-scientist, I am crossing a disciplinary border. I do so acknowledging that I am entering a forest with little knowledge to help me navigate. I call upon the words of Hamberger (2004) when he cited Schrodinger in a discussion of transdisciplinarity, arguing that disciplinary cognition on its own, even within its methodological correctness, risks leading nowhere. This is so, he says, for two reasons: “because detailed disciplinary cognition can easily be regarded as absolute; and because disciplinary cognition allows us to see the trees, but not the forest. To be able to see the full context, we must think transdisciplinarily” (p. 487). McGregor (2004) distinguished between a “complicated situation” and a “complex situation” when she illustrated the feature of emergence in transdisciplinarity. Emergence describes that “process of deriving some new and coherent structures, patterns and properties” (p. 4) as a result of the web of relationships among people.

Is it possible that the self-learning experiences of a group of undergraduate students contribute to conversations about student learning and engagement, enrollment management and student retention? Are there implications for organizational development, program development, curricular design and service delivery? For me, the

most hopeful contribution would be in inviting administrators, faculty, and staff to think differently about what are currently seen as problems. Beyond rethinking how we define and name our beliefs about education and student learning, could we question the very system of thought in which the beliefs were constructed? As Wilber (2000) suggested, we need to change not simply the map, but also the mapmakers.

Figure 3 (page 167) depicts the patterns that emerged from the data as students narrated their self-learning path through their undergraduate studies. I developed this conceptual model to aid my understanding of the process I saw emerging from students' narratives of their self-learning. I will describe Figure 3, the Identity Spiral, and explain the headings of the chapter to assist the reader in following my thinking.

Each student in this inquiry entered university with a particular context, the lived experience in family, community and the cultural milieu. This is represented by the left-hand column: Family, Community, Culture as Context, separated by a vertical line. A spiral shape proceeds from left to right, with arrows indicating movement. The spiral is an ancient symbol, described by Arrien (1987) as reflecting the universal experience of "growth and evolution; the experience of changing or evolving to new levels" (p. 224). Several headings are spread across the spiral, indicating areas of focus. The words Disorientation and Reorientation are large and bold, one over and one under the spiral. These indicate the field of student *experiences* over the course of their undergraduate degree, which appear to follow a pattern of disorientation and reorientation. I have identified the various sources of, and influences on, this recursive process as "Expectations and Experience," "Managing Relationships (partnered)," and "Friends and Social Networks."

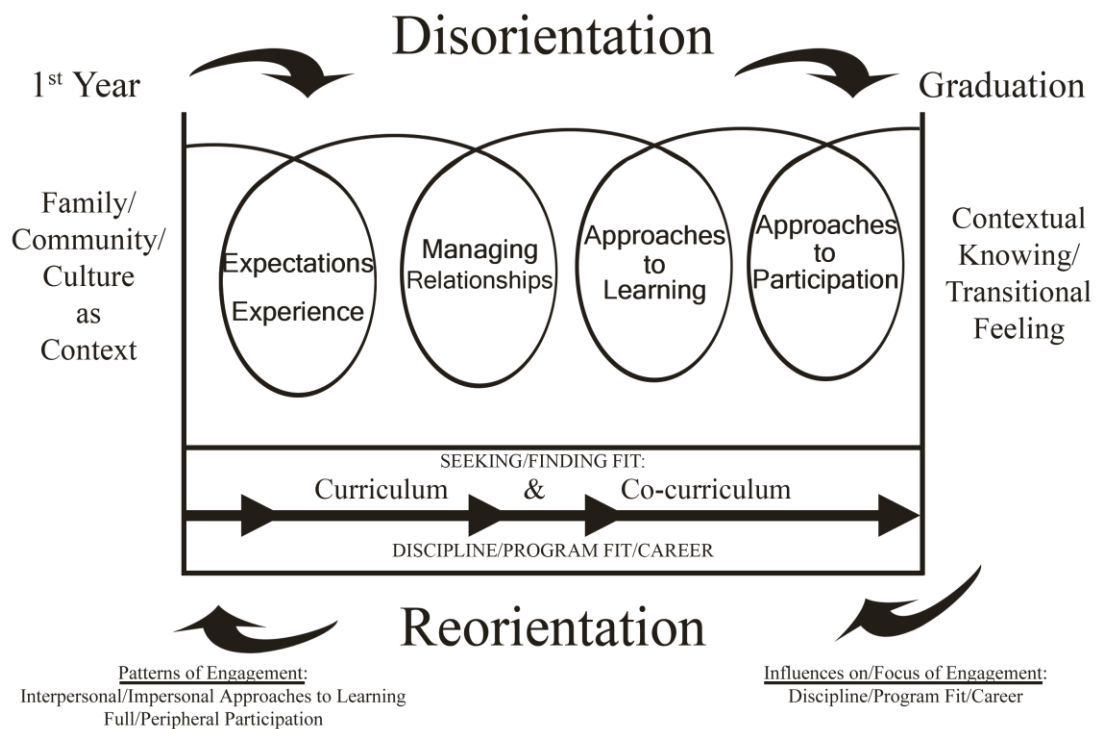
In the field of experiences, there appeared a *trajectory*, a directional seeking, labelled “Seeking and Finding Fit.” The influences on that trajectory are identified as: “Discipline, Program Fit, and Career.” However, the trajectory was also influenced by two *patterns of engagement*: “Approaches to Participation” and “Approaches to Learning.” *Sources of engagement* in this trajectory were represented by the heading “Curriculum and Co-curriculum.” Here I have used the labels *curriculum* and *co-curriculum* in the sense of “association with academic (credit-based) learning” and “work or volunteer settings not associated with academic credit.” All of the above moved with the student toward graduation, where, separated by a second vertical line representing students’ perception of their transition and life beyond graduation is: “Contextual Knowing and Transitional Feeling,” which describes the experience of students’ approaching the transition of graduation as mixed, with distinct epistemological and ontological features.

Participants could describe their ability to think critically, problem-solve, explore diverse beliefs, tolerate ambiguity, and conduct research into subjects of interest. They spoke of satisfaction about being able to discern credible from questionable data sources, and writing in a scholarly or academic style. However, they expressed a sense of uncertainty about managing their experience or process, relational and participatory. They thought they knew what they needed, but it felt tenuous and easily lost.

This model was originally developed as a tool to assist me in understanding the process I observed, or intuited, from the students in the study. At the time I had no purpose beyond creating a visual map as a learning aid. As I have shared my findings and learning with others, I find myself using the Identity Spiral as a tool to explain to others

the process of identity development and its relation to students' academic success, personal health, and social well-being. I now wonder if it holds promise as an analytic tool to help advisors, instructors or counsellors understand where a student might be stuck or caught in a disorienting experience that threatens to interfere with their academic success in the short term or in their persistence to complete their degree program. It might assist faculty in developing curriculum or disciplinary programs with a developmental lens. The Identity Spiral model allows for an analysis of where or how a student might consider engagement in the university experience from a holistic perspective, offering a more productive way for students to consider how they might change their experience. It might also contribute to the development of institutional strategies in areas of student retention or student success. Further research would be necessary to explore the usefulness of this model for such institutional uses.

**Figure 3. The identity spiral**



O’Sullivan (2002) has said that the 21<sup>st</sup> century may be transformative for more reasons than its new millennial status, what it represents in post-modernity, or in its shifting from an industrial to a knowledge economy. What makes it momentous is that as a planet we are at a place where the violence and turbulence in global events signal how far from equilibrium we are. We have the power to annihilate the planet. In education in general, and in higher education in particular, the responsibility for the planet and to the planet must be at the forefront (M’Gonigle & Starke, 2006). As complex adaptive systems, human evolution and institutions of higher education have the capacity, here on the border between complexity and chaos, for new forms to emerge. The next sections will summarize my learning based on my research questions:

*How do students learn about themselves as adults (workers, citizens, members of communities, and contributors to society) in the process of attaining their undergraduate degrees?*

The students who participated in this study would all be described as successful learners. They had navigated most of their undergraduate education at the time of their interviews. Almost all of them (11 of the 12 participants) described learning experiences at university that involved phases of *disorientation*, that is, they experienced a novel (unanticipated) circumstance that created some level of tension requiring attention, focus, time, support, and reflection to resolve and integrate (*reorientation*). Referring to transformative learning processes, O’Sullivan (2002) described the result of this reoriented self as “different the viewed world and the viewpoint of the viewer” (p. 4). The participants in this study related some of their most powerful learning experiences as crises, leading at times to the motivation “to self-organize in more inclusive ways of

knowing, embracing, and integrating data of which [they] had been previously unconscious” (O’Sullivan, 2002). O’Sullivan counted these as the *creative* functions of cognitive crisis.

One of the most compelling patterns in the data appeared in the inherent tension between the experiences described above of what Jackson (2004) called “predicaments” (those experiences that “test the human spirit”) and opportunity for critical reflection. Entities in process are dynamic. In the constant exchange of forms, components, and energy, they move between order and chaos. These *phase transitions* are opportunities for creativity and the *emergence* of new forms. David experienced such an emergence through his experience of bio-chemistry and his decision to change his major. Toward the end of his degree he encountered a transformational learning experience that catalyzed him to co-create a directed-studies course and inspired him to want to learn more about how people learn. At the time of the interview process, David was considering graduate school in his future plans. Heidi had her world turn upside down when her relationship ended three weeks into her first semester at UVic. Her emergence occurred through a process of building strong, new relationships, testing herself regularly, but not recognizing until quite close to graduation that she was no longer a shy, fearful girl, but a successful student who had worked to pay for her whole education, including a semester of travel. She became willing to take risks such as challenging herself in a difficult summer work placement and was successful in her application to a highly competitive graduate program in occupational therapy.

The “predicaments” described by students ranged from early experiences of university that did not match their expectations to relationship issues, decision-making dilemmas, losses of a family member, a goal, or a relationship and, in one situation, a life-threatening illness. Jackson (2004) called for learning that requires systematic reconceptualization of lived experience of all types. This means examining two areas of student experience currently viewed as distinct: (1) personal experiences that occur outside the academic experience or the co-curriculum, which I sometimes describe to students in my counselling role as: “Life continuing to happen to you while you’re a student;” and (2) experiential learning in the curriculum and co-curriculum. Both kinds of experiential learning encourage emergent and transformative learning or withdrawal and disengagement. The ways in which students engaged or disengaged, reflected on or deflected their often painful experiences, sought out support from family, peers, professors or student services had a great deal to do with their process of reorientation. Often students coped by enacting some of each of the above strategies.

I interpret this as students learning about themselves through experiences and that there may be a necessary place for struggle. Several theorists such as Piaget, Erikson, and Mezirow have described this as a crisis, dissonance, or disorientation. The current climate of market-driven education and disengaged students may result in a climate of fear such as students who are afraid of failure, and faculty who are afraid of their student evaluations. In order to create an environment where it is acceptable to struggle and, in fact, where the experience or struggle is an important source of one’s learning, there must be a shift in focus from outcome to process. Outcome is important but process is integral to outcome. For such a process to be *educative* in the Deweyian sense, students must be

supported in building their resilience. Caine et al. (2005) noted that resilience and self-efficacy have a great deal in common. Whereas self-efficacy refers to an innate belief in oneself and one's ability to learn and achieve, developed from previous experience, resilience refers to "the ongoing deep capacity to bounce back from failure" (Caine et al., 2005, p. 21). While the participants in this study demonstrated varying degrees of these attributes, the role of self-efficacy and resilience in learning raises an important curricular question about ways in which learning is structured to support the development of such attributes. When they complain that students are immature or ill-prepared to learn, some faculty seem surprised to hear that students are still in a developmental process. Further, they may question their role in supporting such development. Weathersby (1997) stated that ego (identity) development is an inextricable goal of higher education. I think that may qualify as a "well-kept secret."

The phenomenon of *sensitive dependence on initial conditions*, a quality of all complex entities, is descriptive of small changes bringing about large effects in the long term. Examples from participants' stories include Julia's experience of an in-class debate in an English course for science majors that contributed to her decision to leave her science program, change her major, and her career goals. Another example was Nansi's experience of support from a professor who acknowledged her courage in carrying on with her school commitments when she was devastated by her grandmother's death. Other examples were Rosa's mother nagging her one more time to get involved at school or Pami's choice to participate in a co-curricular program that showed her that the staff coordinator of the program embodied some of the attributes she recognized as valuable

and necessary for her own growth and learning as an international student. Small things matter.

### **Culture as a site of identity work.**

I use the term *cultural identity* in this project because it encompasses racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Cultural identity is similar to ethnic and racial identity but the common factor does not have to be ethnic. Groups with common values, customs, practices and experiences might be religious groups or gay, lesbian, or bisexual communities. Members of cultural groups, ethnic or otherwise, experience varying degrees of identification with the group, participate in the customs or activities of the group, and have similar belief systems. They often experience oppression in ways similar to those described by racial identity models. That these cultures' values and identities are being challenged by globalization is the subject of debate in all disciplines. If identity work is seen to involve the tension between becoming someone and belonging somewhere, the lived experience of increasing numbers of students (including but not limited to international students, students belonging to religious or spiritual communities, immigrant Canadians, First Nations students, students who self-identify as differently gendered, and first generation Canadians of immigrant families) will embody this tension. As Sarup (1996) stated, any study of identity must be localized in space and time; it must be "located." In our increasingly diverse learning communities, recognizing the essential discomfort of attempting to understand and honour difference, the challenge of creating spaces of exploration within and across difference, (including what Kristeva calls the divided subject, the internalized other) and of unpacking one's embedded assumptions about culture, story and belief will become increasingly important. The

students in this study, including those representing both dominant and non-dominant cultures, spoke of the stimulating and, at times, troubling learning they had experienced examining the meaning and significance of culture. Courses they named in which they had opportunities to read, write, discuss and listen, ranged from history, literary theory and women's studies to environmental studies and intercultural studies. This is a strong and positive sign in university education, but it is not enough. Courses dealing with culture could exist in every discipline and might well be sites of interdisciplinary curriculum development.

*How does the experience of university education influence students' self-learning within curricular and co-curricular settings?*

As a starting place, let me propose that we consider what Bohm (1980) suggested is the "implicate order," that everything is imbedded in everything else and that, ontologically, things or objects are subordinate to flows or patterns. Selby (2002) suggested that from this place we consider entities such as humans not as objects but as *processes*. If we conceive of students learning and engaging as "entities in process," the role of relationships to self, others, culture, and to curriculum, become, in Selby's words, a "multi-leveled and multi-dimensional dance" (p. 83).

Several of the participants in this study said they had learned something new about themselves through participating in the reflective conversations of the interviews. Reflective conversations represent two of the 10 considerations for better learning identified by Jackson (2004): reflective experience inside and outside class. Kuh et al. (1991, 2005) stated that there is a strong connection between student learning and personal development. Pedagogies that value transmission of knowledge over facilitating

co-construction of knowledge or personal reflection often result in what several participants described as the “memorize, memorize, memorize, regurgitate, regurgitate, regurgitate, move on and forget” phenomenon. What Astin (1997) described as “involvement” included five postulates, ranging from investment of psychological and physical energy in some kind of activity to qualitative and quantitative measures of “how” and “how much.” He acknowledged that there are different amounts and tolerances for activities and there is a relationship between the benefits derived from involvement and the quantity and quality of effort expended. The effectiveness of any policy or practice is related to the extent to which it encourages students to take initiative and become engaged in appropriate activities.

In this study, students demonstrated what I described as different kinds of participation. They had different orientations to participation, both inside and outside the classroom. Of the students who were peripherally involved (Katie, Jerry, and Jonathon), all three expressed disappointment or lack of belief in their growth and learning while at university. While these students had very different explanations of their participation, they shared one thing: none of them saw a compelling reason to risk participating differently.

Katie’s early learning about debt, her lack of family financial support, and her determination to achieve her goals independently had a strong influence on her decisions to work two jobs while attending full-time classes. Katie came from a family where financial problems had contributed to conflict and distress. She was determined to graduate without debt and knew that her parents could not help her financially. As a result, her primary form of participation on campus occurred

through her part-time job. She worked a minimum of two jobs through most of her undergraduate experience and, although still considering graduate school, acknowledged that getting through her education had been very hard and had cost her physically and emotionally. Moreover, she did not know any of her professors well enough and they did not know her well enough to write good letters of reference for her, thus jeopardizing her chances of successfully applying to graduate schools.

Most participants moved through their undergraduate experiences into new ways of thinking about themselves and their future plans. A few participants, however, related a more circular or single-minded experience that resulted in a feeling of “stuckness” or lack of growth. Jonathon spoke of his experience of relationship loss and his coping:

I feel like I’ve gotten a little less sharp, dulled in my ability to interpret new information because I haven’t stayed on top, thrown myself into the readings and kept up that kind of mental exercise I guess.

Jerry said that he had worked incredibly hard in high school and that, in fact, he had never worked so hard in his life. Motivated by a powerful goal of earning a full scholarship for his university education, Jerry said that his teachers in high school “had him in their pockets.” He developed his considerable analytic skills and honed his ability to produce incisive, intellectual papers, a commodity highly valued in academia. Sadly, Jerry was not challenged or supported in stretching his gifts and thus ended his academically successful undergraduate career describing it as a “four-year make-work project.” In a recent article in the online publication “Inside Higher Ed” (Lederman, 2010), an interesting finding was noted: the longitudinal, mixed methods study of student

engagement reported that some of the students who had the highest academic results were the least engaged, while the most exceptionally engaged students had more average grades. This raises questions about the complex nature of the relationship between academic achievement and the dynamic process of participation and engagement. The participants in this research study shared an increased sense of self-learning when their engagement was greater.

### **The role of integrative learning.**

Integrative learning is defined in a joint statement by the Carnegie Foundation and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (2004) as an approach to learning that connects skills and knowledge from multiple sources and experiences, applies theory to practice in a variety of settings, uses diverse and even contradictory points of view, and understands issues and positions contextually. Integrative learning is promoted by Leskes and Miller (2006) as one of four “sophisticated outcomes” of post-secondary learning. They defined a core of knowledge and capacities that *all* students should acquire, regardless of background, field of concentration or chosen institution. This knowledge is associated with the core of contemporary liberal education. The outcomes described by Leskes and Miller (2006) include:

1. *Integrative learning* (the ability to connect knowledge across fields, experiences, and levels) is a central characteristic of the intentional learner.
2. *Inquiry learning* (the ability to formulate and answer complex questions) is a vital tool of the empowered learner.
3. *Global learning* (the ability to understand and find interrelations among the world’s communities) is a resource for the informed learner.

4. *Civic learning* (the ability to understand and participate in decisions that shape and influence a diverse democratic society) is a foundation for the responsible learner (Leskes & Miller, 2006, p. 2).

Clearly these abilities are linked. They can be developed in the curriculum and the co-curriculum. These general goals do not conflict with traditional disciplinary content; indeed, they are often developed in concert. What they require is sustained collaboration and dialogue across the institution. Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) proposed, “It is the network, the connections among objectives, that is important . . . to understand an overall picture that will ensure the development of integrated knowledge” (p. 139).

#### **Interdisciplinarity.**

While integrative learning is described by Klein (2005) as a broader, more inclusive term that includes interdisciplinary studies, she described interdisciplinary studies as a “subset of integrative learning that fosters connections among disciplines and interdisciplinary fields” (p. 1). The intersection of integration and interdisciplinary learning requires a pedagogical approach that restructures learning through seminars or experiences that are typically theme-/problem-/question-based. Leskes and Miller (2006) suggested that, because they are less bounded by traditions, interdisciplinary programs may be “fertile incubation sites” for innovations in teaching and learning (p. 30). There are correspondences between interdisciplinary learning and collaborative learning. David spoke of one of his most powerful learning experiences in an interdisciplinary course:

I find that people are a lot more open to other ideas. People are willing to accept alternate theories and alternate explanations to things, to so to speak tell the story in two different languages. But can they go and tell the same story at the end?

And that's one of the things that I'm studying: can you look at something from the perspective of biology but look at it from geography as well, and they sure enough speak very different languages, but do they arrive at the same story ultimately?

[David had been so inspired by his learning experience he had taken on an independent studies course with the instructor to explore this]. And I find that in general there's definitely exceptions for people even if they don't necessarily understand the language that they're speaking to tell the story, they understand the story in the end? And I find that this is a very important aspect of cooperative learning. I find that to invite other disciplines and perspectives and to give you a far greater understanding of the thing because you are hearing a story in another language. You are opening your eyes and ears to that other perspective. And I think that has been a very important part of my educational experience, is the ability to have, or, I think it's a gift, to be able to hear other perspectives on it instead of just your own, or the one that you're used to hearing.

### **Collaborative learning.**

This study shows conflicting evidence of collaborative learning as a site for creativity and emergence. Sawyer et al. (2003) have suggested that contradictory findings reflect experimental designs that throw strangers together and do not allow time for trust and complementarity to emerge. This contrasts with a developmental approach that Vygotsky (1962) asserted is crucial to development and emergence. Further, Sawyer suggested that an interesting link between collaboration and Vygotskian theory is present in the dialectic tensions between personality and culture, emotion and cognition. In one large-scale, multi-institutional survey of collaborative learning studies (Cabrera et al.,

2002), collaborative learning inside and outside of the classroom has been shown to contribute to higher levels of cognitive and personal development in a range of measures. All of the participants in the current study had participated in collaborative learning as part of their undergraduate experience. There was a wide range of responses to these learning experiences, ranging from Jerry's outright distaste to David's strong preference for collaborative learning. All the women reported neutral to positive experiences with collaborative learning. Interestingly, Cabrera et al. (2002) reported White women's and minorities' learning styles emphasizing connected knowing, cooperative problem-solving, and socially based knowledge, which is congruent with this study's findings.

Wenger (1998) described collaborative learning in communities of practice (of which education is one kind, along with families, work, and hobbies as examples of the multiple communities of practice we inhabit). He stated, "In spite of curriculum, discipline, and exhortation, the learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice" (p. 6). While this was evident in the stories of the individual learners in this study, Wenger suggested that there are broader implications for what is necessary to understand and support learning: "For organizations, it means that learning is an issue of sustaining the *interconnected communities of practice* through which an organization knows what it knows and thus becomes effective and valuable as an organization" (p. 8) [italics added]. One such form of collaboration could involve the types of partnership described in figure 1, from chapter 1 of this study, where a shared responsibility for student learning would include academic affairs and student affairs staff working together to develop and facilitate seamless and diverse learning environments (ACPA & NASPA, 1998). One

such possibility might exist as a joint initiative between academic and student affairs. In this initiative, faculty could develop community-based learning experiences that would facilitate authentic learning that connects community needs with curriculum content and student learning (also known as community service learning or CSL). A rapidly growing professional and scholarly community in Canada, represented by the Canadian Alliance for Community Service Learning, offers networking, professional development, education, and curriculum-design support for schools and community members seeking to learn more about this form of pedagogy. A recognized pedagogical strategy that promotes personal growth, CSL has been shown to enhance academic learning. This has not necessarily occurred in “fact” recall because students who experience service learning usually show higher scores in application and synthesis types of questions than their peers (Strage, 2000), and promote civic engagement. Service learning programs at other Canadian universities provide us with a range of powerful, research- and evidence-based models of curricular and co-curricular community-based learning and research projects. Exploring service learning would be another area of research in the scholarship of teaching and learning at this institution.

A currently untapped resource at this university exists in the growing number of faculty who engage in community-based research. For the most part, students currently involved in this form of scholarship tend to be graduate students. One possible barrier to developing this form of pedagogy might be related to the system of tenure and reward for faculty. Such work, as described above, takes time, commitment, and energy, which takes away from time, commitment, and energy devoted to publication in peer-reviewed journals and the accrual and execution of externally funded research grants.

**Other forms of experiential learning.**

Curricular and co-curricular opportunities exist to increase the possible sites for learning, experience, and reflection for undergraduate students. An area of strength at this university lies in its cooperative education programs, both compulsory and optional. Two of the participants in this study had participated in coop programs and both spoke highly of their learning experiences. They appreciated, in particular, their development of increased confidence and awareness of their own career-related strengths and abilities. However, the structure, purpose and function of cooperative education is neither appropriate nor accessible to a large percentage of the student population. Institutional data for the year 2007-8 show student participation rates in cooperative education ranging from 3.5% in the Faculty of Humanities, 5% in the Faculty of Fine Arts, 9.6% in the Faculty of Social Sciences, 13.9% in the Faculty of Sciences, to 95.5% in the Faculty of Business (Coop Headcount, 2007-8; UVic Factbook, 2007-8). Faculties such as Education and Human and Social Development build practicum experience into their undergraduate curriculum, with the Faculty of Education providing a one-year post-degree professional program (PDPP), which offers yet another opportunity to structure experiential learning. Further, student activism did not emerge from the small sample of students involved in this project but has been shown to contribute to personal learning. Sports activities, cultural activities, clubs and course unions all provide excellent opportunities for unstructured experiential learning. It might be useful to explore integrative learning across the institution to find ways of supporting the four learning outcomes described earlier in this section.

Harward (2008) described the “most fundamental of our responsibilities as “the development of the whole person—intellectual, emotive/behavioural, and civic” (§ 2). Recognizing diversity among student learners and supporting their ability to integrate their learning is critical to developing a variety of experiential opportunities in the disciplines and in the co-curriculum. Jackson (2004) stated that all human learning is individualized (p. 130) and warned against a curriculum that is conceived as something “done to students,” stating that, whether learning is incidental or directed, it is (1) holistic (not exclusively cognitive), and (2) uniquely organized when it is first acquired and when it is reworked in memory.

*What do students see themselves as having gained and developed through their academic experience as interests, skills and values?*

University is a really sort of condensed learning. They drag you across a whole load of subjects so fast and you just touch on an idea and don't really have any more [time] . . . . There's too much to learn . . . you'll just touch on ideas, have an idea of what that is and go back and research that yourself . . . . So now that I'm almost done my degree and I'm looking for a career, I can go “Oh yeah, I really liked learning about that in one of my classes” and go back and research it myself.

(Sharon)

Sharon is a business student who lives life at full throttle. While she thrived on the fast pace and variety of experiences offered by her program, Sharon did not seem to question that she had time only to touch on ideas. Participants varied greatly in their assessment of what they had gained through their academic experience. David knew that he would probably end up working with people, that the skills he had come to value in

himself involved his ability to share his learning experience and facilitate others' learning. David said:

Helping people and maybe helping the ecosystems and social assistance while we're at it. I think that's going to be the very broad goal of it. How I want to do it and why I want to do that, that's left to be determined but I can't leave the Earth without knowing that I did something good for someone else. Or a group of people.

Kenzie spoke of the significance of her learning experience and touched on the transformation of her understanding about career:

When I first came to university I was thinking: I have to choose something, I have to do that thing for the rest of my life. I have to do that one thing and I have to be good at it. And what I've kind of come to realize over the four years is that I don't have to do the one thing. I can do many things. Right now I'm just trying to do: how I can do all these many things that I want to do. Kind of like a renaissance soul kind of thing. Like, I have too many passions to just pick one. And the, uh, what I'm trying to figure out now is how I can build a career and this lifestyle in which I don't have to pick one. Like how I can combine all of my passions and do them all at once.

The participants in this study did not have a clear sense of their values as we began the research conversations; however, they could respond to my tentative suggestions as to their values and described the ones that resonated through their stories. While this did not surprise me, it is disappointing that understanding one's values or

seeing the relationship between one's values and career development, lifestyle, and relationship choices is not named or articulated as important in many disciplines.

*What is the relationship between the self-learning and the ways in which they believe they can apply their learning to "the real world" in their career development and in the communities they inhabit? What did not emerge?*

One disappointing finding in this study relates to my final research question, which might have stemmed from my inability to express the question clearly. I usually asked the question in two parts, in the first question asking something like, "I'm wondering if you can tell me what you see yourself as having learned about, not just about your career path, but about the world. In the disciplines you've studied . . . I'm talking about global, social, environmental issues that have big, tough problems." This was then followed with a question that asked, "In what ways do you hope to contribute to the world as part of your life and career?" In these questions about contribution I was trying to find out what students imagined they could do and identify any connections they might see between their university education and that contribution.

Some students said in answer to the first part of the question that they did not feel as though they had learned much about these kinds of concerns in their disciplines. Pami said, "I don't think my discipline really acknowledge[s] these kinds of issues. They don't really go into detail, how it applies to the real world." Katie clarified the question first: "What do you mean? (Can you say what you've learned about those kinds of problems?) "Hmmm. From my degree?" (Mmm hmmm.) "Not a whole lot." (Really?) "I would say probably nothing, really . . . I think I've learned more about environment and politics and all that kind of stuff more from just meeting different people outside of school."

Sharon saw that building her business would allow her to give to charities. Heidi saw her contribution as a hope to adopt rather than have her own children but was vague about whether she would adopt internationally or in Canada. She spoke about not being part of any political movement or team, not being an environmentalist, but seeing her duty to support sustainability and respect the environment. Pami said:

If I do get everything I want, if I do make a lot of money and get everything straightened out, I hope to contribute to the world, do community work, provide funding for people in need to create an organization that helps solve world issues in some way.

Jonathon was uncertain about contribution but thought that teaching might be a way to touch a person's life. Nansi, also aiming for an education career, was passionate in her desire to create a classroom that cultivated respect for diversity, naming respect for diverse religions and cultures as something she dreamed about including in her classroom. Jerry spoke of his desire to understand the rules so he could break them, but not in "stupid" ways. He said:

So if I'm looking at working I'm looking at how am I contributing to the local economy, the national, global economy, things like that? That doesn't mean that I'm sitting there and making those foolish decisions to buy free trade coffee because it actually hurts the farmers, things like that, it's just that I look at it more from a national standpoint.

Anita saw herself as helping people in her work, making small changes or giving people the tools to change, saying that her education had helped her become more realistic in her goals and understanding of change processes. When asked about contribution to the

world, Katie spoke of contribution to her immediate world and said she hoped to publish, perhaps a journal article.

The student development programs housed in the co-curriculum provided a place where much self-learning was facilitated in a variety of programs in Student Services, Continuing Studies, and Registration and Enrolment Services. Kuh et al. (1991, 2005) noted that students spend more hours per week outside of class than in, and that focusing on out-of-class experience is a key to learning and personal development. As shown in several of the students' narratives, participation in these programs provided a site of much valued experiential self-learning. Participants described their engagement as peer helpers, as participants in the Student Leadership Program, as cultural assistants in the English Language Centre, as residence advisors, and as volunteers with the New Student Orientation Program as important in helping them learn about their passions, their strengths, and transferable skills they had not recognized they had. As a practitioner in Student Services, I am undoubtedly biased in my belief in the importance of programs such as those listed above. I am also realistic enough to know that they have a limited capacity to serve students, due to limited institutional resources and to the fact that these programs do not provide a good fit with all types of student learners.

### **Revisiting the Change Model**

On page 15 of chapter 1, I explained the "Change Model for Higher Education" that influenced my search for a research question and the parameters of its context. While the model explains my views of the influences, pressures and tensions on the system of higher education, the results of this inquiry point to one area of the model that may necessitate further scholarly inquiry and heightened tolerance of conflict in the process of

transformative change. This conflict represents one type of unresolved tension in the change process I described. If, as historian Thomas Bender suggested (2001), higher education is caught between the disciplinary organization of knowledge—the aim of which is not synthesis but rather method, theory, and disciplinary development—and a charter of liberal education that encourages intellectual bio-diversity and civic engagement on the other, the power and limitations of the disciplines appear to be dominating scholarship, while civic engagement is prominent in recruitment and retention programs. Bender suggested that recognizing both the power and the limitation of disciplines is essential to the development of a “both and” approach to the work of the university. Further, he described his own choice to “move back and forth between a civic and a disciplinary context” (p. 6 of 9), in which he encourages his graduate students to advance the discipline while synthesizing and prompting “moral and civic reflection” at the undergraduate level. This is but one example of a faculty-based approach to resolving the tension between these two positions regarding the work of the university. It does, however, show the imperative of involving disciplinary groups more fully in exploration of the topic of civic engagement.

This university has made a commitment to providing students with the services they need to assist them in navigating the “predicaments” that threaten to interfere with their ability to engage and learn effectively. These services include learning support services, advising services, counselling, and health services to name a few. At this university, Student Services are in a transitional phase. Historically they were seen as separate from the academic enterprise but they are now viewed as part of the “broader learning environment” (Strategic Plan, 2007, p. 27). Such a change process may require

the reorganization and restructuring of some departments and programs so that they work cross-functionally to achieve the goals of the plan. For example, Academic Advising, Counselling Services, and Coop Education and Career Services are independent services, each with its own mandate. Students needing to explore their options, learn more about themselves, and make good, timely decisions about their program choices must access all three services and often more than once. There is no “Office of Finding Your Way” and, facetious as that sounds, perhaps there does not need to be. What is necessary is an institution-wide understanding of the positional nature (Bender, 2001) of their (departmental or disciplinary) versions of knowledge.

The faculty and staff of this university might explore goals such as integrative and interdisciplinary approaches to learning, possibly by comparing the relative learning benefits with learning outcomes experienced in more traditional curricula. The challenge of change is probably most complex in changing the culture of the larger organization so that, as Wilber (2000) noted, we change not simply the map but also the mapmakers. In this way, students, staff, and faculty might understand this network of services and relationships in novel, as yet undetermined ways.

**Limitations: Who was not present.**

As stated in chapter 3, this study has obvious limitations in its design and scope. It was not intended to generate data that could be generalized for all traditional-aged students; indeed, appreciation of the diversity of students’ stories, contexts and cultures was a strong aspect of the emergent design. It was part of the study’s sampling strategy to keep the criteria general enough so that, as stated elsewhere, “who showed up” was an area of interest. I want to state again that the stories of students who were not present in

this study would enrich the themes that might emerge from them. The list includes but is not limited to students with a disability, students who self-identify as differently gendered, and First Nations students. Mature students and distance students were also excluded due to the sampling strategy. Understanding the changes in identity experienced by older students with more complex work and life experience and learners at a distance are important, and present even more varied challenges. We need to learn more about all our learners.

Further, the narrative design of the study yielded far more data than could be included. My naïveté as a researcher was probably a factor—I opted for breadth of questions *and* depth of exploration. The result is that I could be “mining” these data for years. In the end, I made decisions as to what was most relevant to the research questions. This is an important learning point for me as a researcher and leads me to the next place of inquiry.

**Limitations: Research design.**

By choosing a narrative-phenomenological design, I sought to understand students’ sense of their own stories. For example, this study used a single point in time for data collection and required students to reflect over numerous years of their experience at university. Further, it sought participants across faculties but, because of its sampling strategies, did not specify that it sought students in particular academic programs or departments. These limitations do not render the findings invalid; rather, they point to ways that future research might seek to combine methodologies and sampling strategies to capture and explore the patterns of a range of students’ experience, learning and development over time.

In a recent article in *Inside Higher Ed*, an online publication of the American Association of Colleges and Universities (Lederman, 2010), a report on students' "episodic" engagement used surveys and interviews throughout students' academic career to explore the complexities of "engagement." It would be of interest to use mixed methods within a longitudinal design to explore the relationship between engagement and self-learning, as well as other indicators of well-being and development.

**Limitations: Researcher competence.**

I learned an incredible amount from the experience of conducting the interviews. I learned that, even as a trained listener, I talk too much. I would explain too much and had to be vigilant not to allow myself to get distracted if, for example, a participant brought up something that I had information about (most commonly this would involve career-related information). Trying to remember to bring it up at the end of the interview interfered with my concentration, so it would not often get shared.

At times, listening to an interview I would ask myself, "Why didn't you pursue that further?" Sometimes time was the factor in choosing to move on rather than invite further exploration of an interesting turn. I recognize now that time was something I should have allowed more of and ensured, whenever possible, that participants understood and had the time they were agreeing to give.

In the narrative interviews, I felt good about my decision to check with participants by sharing the story I created, but I would do it differently next time. Some participants loved the experience of reading about themselves in the third person and said they gained insights but others found it "odd." If I had to do it again, I would invite

participants to write a response to the narrative and to edit the story they were sent, rather than bring their thoughts on a scrap of paper or in their memories.

I would add video recording to the audio recording to capture another layer of paralinguistic data: gesture, body language, facial expression, and gaze. Even though I made field notes, much of that was lost.

### **Questions for Further Research**

Questions arising from this research include investigating where these students are now. It would be of interest to explore how their lives have proceeded in the two years since the interviews. Have they moved toward the goals they held at the point of graduation? What strange attractors might have influenced their path? How might their perception of their undergraduate education and its contribution to their self-learning have shifted with further exposure to life experience and graduate or professional work?

Each participant identified at least one professor or course that was significant for them. Their descriptions of the value of their learning in that relationship suggested that there might be resonance with a particular faculty member's values or philosophy of teaching. Faculty attitudes and beliefs about teaching and student learning are central influences on their practice of teaching and facilitating learning. It would be a fascinating research project to explore faculty stories of their own identity as scholars and teachers.

### **Conclusion**

In the face of evidence that higher education is becoming increasingly corporatized (Kezar et al., 2005) and faculty are feeling disenfranchised (Currie & Newson, 1998), there is also evidence of increasing fragmentation within the learning

community (Currie, 1998). Students are demonstrating greater difficulty in developing a strong, resilient sense of self (Cote, 2000) and are showing evidence of increasingly “careerist” motivations for pursuing higher education (Kezar et al., 2005). At the same time, graduates are experiencing increasing difficulty finding career related work after graduation, contributing to increased anxiety about the relevance of an undergraduate degree (Zernike, 2010). This study has explored the process of undergraduates’ self-learning within curricular and co-curricular settings in order to contribute to the conversation centering on student learning and engagement, higher education mission and outcomes, and the increasingly complex change process affecting all aspects of the university community.

The students who participated in this study would all be described as successful learners. They had all navigated most of their undergraduate education at the time of their interviews. They all shared learning experiences during their time at university that involved phases of *disorientation*, that is, they experienced a novel (unanticipated) circumstance that created some level of tension that required attention, focus, support, time, and reflection to resolve and integrate (*reorientation*). Referring to transformative learning processes, O’Sullivan (O’Sullivan et al., 2002) described as different the viewed world and the viewpoint of the viewer (p. 4). The participants in this study related some of their most powerful learning experiences as crises, leading at times to the motivation “to self-organize in more inclusive ways of knowing, embracing, and integrating data of which [they] had been previously unconscious” (O’Sullivan et al., 2002).

The participants could all identify courses and professors that they enjoyed and valued, but few could identify a classroom-based learning experience in a course that

contributed to their self-learning in powerful ways. The examples participants did offer focused on group work, where the learning was identified more with learning how to work with others or learning where one's strengths were, field trips (visiting a longhouse and experiencing powerful learning about language and culture from an elder), and community-based learning (field work or practica in which the students volunteered with a community agency and made links to their personal and academic learning through their experience of supervision).

An institution that approaches the learning enterprise as preparation for “constructive global citizenship and civic engagement” (Strategic Plan, 2007, p. 10) requires an institution-wide strategy for developing the kinds of integrative learning experiences that engage students *and* faculty in self-learning projects. These projects could foster learning about self, increasing understanding and respect for diverse others, and encourage authentic engagement with local and global communities. A worthwhile future study might explore the implementation of such an integrative learning plan, investigating, for example, outcomes and effectiveness, in areas such as contribution to identity development, curricular knowledge, career awareness, and commitment to community. As Erikson (1968) stated, “True ‘engagement’ with others is the result and the test of firm self-delineation” (p. 167).

This study has explored the role of curriculum in the self-learning of traditional-aged undergraduate students. The aim has been to increase our understanding of the kinds of learning experiences that might contribute to integral education (Nicolescu, 1998) that facilitates critical reflection on key concepts, larger agendas, and personal meaning. At the same time, it should support students in developing their skills, gifts, and abilities to

participate in the “moment of complexity” while instilling in them the most important legacy we can: “The hope that creative change is still possible” (Taylor, 2001, p. 324).

## Coda

*To act responsibly in higher education, we must know who we are.*  
*W.M. Sullivan (2000)*

As I approach the end of this journey, I continue to meet my friend Judith, another doctoral student, for support and coffee. Our conversations are filled with our stories of relationships: of data, writing, and ideas, of children and family, of health and dis-ease. Certain themes run through these conversations, with one of us often pointing out to the other that this or that might be another example of a finding, a theme, or something we are suggesting might be present in our data. I am struck, periodically, by the thought that it is often easier for the other to see what one who is still mired in a thought or feeling cannot. That sense of comprehending and reasserting what one knows is facilitated in the interaction between two friends, facilitating that subject and object (Kegan, 1994) shift, that spiral of identity and intellectual development mentioned earlier.

As an example of this learning process, one question asked of me early on in my doctoral program was, “Are you a constructivist?” I remember vividly feeling caught in the spotlight. What was my answer? As von Glasersfeld (1995) would observe, I can only reflect on that experience from my present constructs, but the emotional component that is most salient is fear. What if I get it wrong? Is there a correct, or “most correct” answer? I think that what I was most afraid of, in that conversation, was being found out and then judged. I think I knew I was indeed a constructivist. I must admit before this project draws to a close that Janet Sheppard is (probably) a constructivist. I use the qualifier “probably” not because I am still not sure and want to hedge my answer in case the right one comes along, but because I believe that as I continue to deepen my

understanding of learning, mind, self, and reality, I will likely come to question my understanding again. I still cannot say that I am a developmental or a social constructivist because I see them not as different schools of thought, but rather as different aspects of one process. Both are important and both go on; neither is superordinate. How do they interact? Well, that is why I said “probably;” I am still learning.

For me, this learning has been about experience, about learning to recognize what Dewey (1938) called “the organic connection between education and personal experience” (p. 25). I observed this process of self-learning in all the students who participated in this study. Their awareness of, appreciation for, and engagement in, their learning process were as special and unique as their emerging lives.

Learning to trust what I know—even if uncertainty is what I know—means I can trust that I will question it again soon. One of my favourite authors on the subject of writing is the Buddhist scholar, Gail Sher. I kept a small note stuck to my desk during most of my writing process as a reminder of the importance of “not knowing” as a way. Sher (1999) stated that “not knowing” is very respectful [and] it assumes that the object of your curiosity is always new and worthy of your entire attention (p. 172). Moreover, as I approached the conclusion of my writing, I began to imagine the possibilities of an as-yet unrealized future. I found myself wondering how, if at all, my life might be different after completing this doctoral project. Will my work change? Will there be other changes in my life? I must acknowledge that it was my dear friend Judith who pointed out that my sense of uncertainty, the “Contextual Knowing” and “Transitional Feeling” of coming close to the end of this learning exercise, seems to mirror the transitional feeling of my participants as they approach the end of their undergraduate studies.

Once again this indicates a relational setting that facilitates openness to learning and questioning. Not all relationships facilitate openness of this kind but openness to questioning and learning, for me, usually requires relationship. As I reflect on what supports me in moving forward, trusting my knowledge and abilities, I know it is the network of supportive communities to which I belong. Colleagues, peers, intimate friends and trusted family all play a role in supporting my changing sense of self. As Marton and Booth (1997) asserted, “Development can be seen as continuous differentiation and integration of the experienced world . . . . Whatever we learn or gain knowledge about, our learning takes place as part of our ongoing exploration of the world, our constituting the world . . . . That which we learn about has to become a part of the world we know” (p. 138).

Self-learning is such an integral part of what education is for and about that it explains why working and learning in a university environment is, for me, such a gift. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to engage in this part of my learning journey in the company of the students who participated in this project, and in the company of all of those students with whom I have had the privilege of working over the many years of my life, education and career.

It is my deepest wish that the system in which I work can evolve in its complex identity to support the development and facilitation of knowledge, values, and behaviours essential to the advancement of our students, our communities, our planet, and our ability to work in creative and sustainable ways.

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## Appendix A. Faculty Letter

Dear Colleague,

I am writing this letter on behalf of Ms. Janet Sheppard, one of my doctoral students in the Dept. of Curriculum and Instruction. Ms. Sheppard's study for her dissertation is investigating what kinds of learning experiences contribute most to students' experience of identity development. In particular, she is examining what students identify as those learning experiences that help them learn the most about themselves and the world outside university.

In order to conduct this research, Ms. Sheppard wishes to interview university students in the last year of their undergraduate study. Students who volunteer for her study will participate in two interviews in an office in Counselling Services at UVic. In order to obtain a sufficiently large pool of volunteers, we are requesting your assistance by asking you to allow her to speak for 5 minutes at the end of one of your classes in order to solicit volunteers for her study. If you are willing to consider this opportunity, please contact Ms. Sheppard at 721-8341, or by e mail ([jsheppa1@uvic.ca](mailto:jsheppa1@uvic.ca)).

If you have any questions about her study, you could also contact me at 721-7794 or by email ([lfrancis@uvic.ca](mailto:lfrancis@uvic.ca)).

Thank you for your assistance.

Leslee Francis Pelton  
Dept. of Curriculum and Instruction  
University of Victoria

## Appendix B. In-class Script

**Note:**

1. **Upon securing agreement from faculty of selected upper year classes, the researcher intends to seek permission to speak with the class in the last 5-10 minutes of class. The researcher will invite the professor to leave the class a few minutes early in order to remove any implied expectation of cooperation (power-over).**

**Script for in-class invitation:**

“Hello, my name is Janet Sheppard. Thank you for giving me a few minutes of your class time. I would like to tell you about a research project I am conducting as part of my doctoral studies. I’m here to invite you to participate, but it’s very important that you understand **THERE IS NO OBLIGATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.**

**This study is aimed at understanding how and what university students learn about themselves and how they might contribute to the world in the context of their undergraduate learning experience.** I am interested in what kinds of learning experiences you have found helpful (or not) in terms of helping you prepare for your life beyond university.

I hope to interview between 10 and 20 students between the ages of 20 and 24. I will be conducting a narrative study, which will involve two in-depth interviews of 60 to 90 minutes. I realize that this is a significant amount of time in your very busy lives and I am offering a small honorarium of \$10 per participant as an acknowledgement of that contribution.

Your mark in this course will not be affected in any way by your participation or non-participation. Your professor will not know who agrees to participate and who does not. The only restrictions to your participation are your age and any prior relationship with me in my other role as a counsellor in Counselling Services. This last restriction is to protect you

If you are interested in learning more, I have information packages for you to take with you (Appendix 1 Research Poster, Appendix 2 Informed Consent Letter).”

- 2. Answer any questions**
- 3. Hand out packages to interested students.**

**Are you in your last year of undergrad?**

**Between the ages of twenty and twenty-four?**

***Wondering what it's all been about?***

My name is Janet Sheppard and, as part of my doctoral studies in Education at UVic, I am conducting a narrative research study aimed at understanding how and what university students learn about themselves and how they might contribute to the world in the context of their undergraduate learning experience.

If you are interested in participating in two interviews and co-constructing your 'story', please phone or e mail me. The two interviews will take from 60 to 90 minutes each. I will be happy to tell you more about the study and, if you choose to participate, to schedule you for your first interview. I am offering each participant a small honorarium (\$10) to acknowledge the time you are contributing.

**You may contact me at:**

**UVic: 721- 8341 (Counselling Services, UVic)**

**Cell: 888-5390** *(please leave a message!)*

**E mail: jsheppa1@uvic.ca**

## Appendix D. Informed Consent Letter

Date

Dear Prospective Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study entitled “Emergent Selves, Emergent Lives: A Narrative Study of University Students’ Identity Development”, that is being conducted by Janet Sheppard M.Ed.

As a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Victoria, I am required to conduct research as part of my degree requirements. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Leslee Francis-Pelton. Dr. Francis-Pelton’s contact information appears at the end of this letter.

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this research project is to increase our understanding of what kinds of learning experiences contribute most to students’ experience of identity development, that self-knowledge which is central to our ability to manage our adult lives in an increasingly complex world. Current research suggests that the best foundation for one’s life/career path in the global networked economy is a solid sense of self – knowing one’s interests, beliefs, and values, as well as one’s abilities, and how those might contribute to the world in which that person will live and work. This knowledge is necessary to the types of transferable skills required of global citizens. In particular, I am interested in hearing what students identify as those learning experiences which help them learn the most about themselves and the world outside university.

### **Importance of this Research**

This research is important because, as UVic’s current strategic plan acknowledges:

As B.C. evolves from a resource-based to a knowledge-based economy, research and scholarship at our university are increasingly recognized as fundamental to the social, cultural and economic development of society. The University welcomes this perception

and sees education as crucial not only to economic progress but to constructive citizenship.

This increased perception of education as a driver of social and economic progress creates new pressures upon universities, and a renewed focus on the importance and quality of undergraduate education. This research could contribute to program and curriculum development for inter- and trans-disciplinary courses, as well as transition courses to and from university.

### **Participant Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are between 20 and 24 years old and are in the last year of your undergraduate degree. This age group and stage of education will provide a snapshot of how traditionally aged students (those who have gone more or less straight through from high school to university completion) make meaning of that post-secondary learning experience.

### **What is Involved**

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include two interviews of 60-90 minutes each, and the time required to read and reflect on a personal narrative which will be presented before the beginning of the second interview. The interviews will take place in an office in Counselling Services at UVic. They will be audio taped and transcribed, then analyzed as part of creating the personal narrative. This necessitates a break of two to four weeks between the first and second interview. The content of the interviews and any data resulting from those will be kept in strictest confidence; no information resulting from the research will be used without the consent of the participants.

### **Risks or Inconvenience**

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research; the only inconvenience might be the time you choose to donate to this project.

**Benefits**

The potential benefits to you from participating in this research include a stronger appreciation and understanding of your unique interests, abilities, values, and beliefs, and their relationship to your degree experience, your career vision and your life beyond UVic. In addition, the university stands to benefit from a greater understanding of the types of learning experiences which can be identified as contributing to your self-learning, and your ideas about how you want to contribute to the world beyond university.

**Compensation**

I am offering a small honorarium (\$10) as a token of appreciation for the time you are contributing to this project.

**Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequence or explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, your agreement will be sought regarding possible inclusion of your data. If you do not agree, your data will not be used. Withdrawal before the end of the second interview will not affect your receipt of the honorarium.

**Researcher's Relationship with Participants**

I have been a counsellor at UVic for several years. In order to protect you from the possibility of any perceived power-over relationship, you are asked not to participate if you have had a prior therapeutic relationship with me.

**Ongoing consent**

In order to ensure that you freely continue to consent to participation in this research, You will be asked at the time of scheduling the second interview (via e mail) if you agree to continue participation, and you will be asked to sign a second informed consent form. At the end of the research, you will be asked if I may contact you in the future; you may

give a permanent contact at that time whereby I can initiate consent if the data are going to be used in any future research.

### **Anonymity**

Your data will not be anonymous to me, but your data will be given a code to remove any identifying information prior to its use in any published writing.

### **Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of your data will be protected by its storage in a locked cabinet in a secure office. It will not be used or accessed by anyone other than myself or a paid transcriber. After a period of five years, the data will be destroyed.

### **Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others through the completion of the dissertation, possible class presentations, scholarly meetings and or published articles. If you are interested in the overall results of the project, I will be happy to provide access to written copies.

### **Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include myself as the primary researcher: Janet Sheppard, UVic Counselling Services, 721-8341, [jsheppa1@uvic.ca](mailto:jsheppa1@uvic.ca); my supervisor, Dr. Leslee Francis Pelton, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, 721-7794, [lfrancis@uvic.ca](mailto:lfrancis@uvic.ca).

In addition you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria, 721-4545, [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher.

---

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent form will be left with you, and the signed copy will be taken by the researcher.

## Appendix E. Second Interview Informed Consent Form

I agree to participate in the second interview of the research project, 'Emergent Selves, Emergent Lives: A Narrative Study of University Students' Identity Development'. I understand that I may change my mind at any time in this research process, without consequence.

---

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and the signed copy will be taken by the researcher.

## Appendix F. Withdrawal Form

*I choose not to complete the interviews for the narrative study “Emergent Selves, Emergent Lives” for reasons of my own. I do give permission, however, for the researcher to use the data gathered thus far.*

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Name

---

Date

I acknowledge receipt of the \$10 honorarium for the contribution of my time to this project.

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Name

---

Date

## Appendix G. Interview Guide

Note: Prior to beginning interviews, potential participants will have received a letter of invitation, including a written description of the project, information on their time commitment, and a consent form, approved by the Human Subjects Committee. They will be asked to bring that package with them to the first meeting.

### **Introduction of self and study:**

- Welcome and thanks for participating. My background (15 years working as a counsellor at UVic) and interest in the topic of discussion (relating to transition experience from university to world of work, puzzlement around what students have learned about themselves and their ability/desire to contribute to the world. Questions about what works, what students experience as most growth promoting, most helpful in those areas of personal (self-learning.)
- Ask if they have any questions or hopes for themselves in our conversations.
- Explain objectives of the study and nature and purpose of interview questions.
- Explain structure and flexibility of our conversations. Emphasize the difference between a counselling relationship – e.g., exploring underlying feelings and beliefs that might be interfering with their ability to succeed, and this, a research, relationship – exploring their thoughts and memories about their learning experiences. Tell participants that if, in my opinion, we are moving into potentially therapeutic material, that it is my responsibility to point out where this might impact their participation, remind them of the research boundaries, and assure them that there will be time at the end of the interview for appropriate information and referral. Tell participants that, in the unlikely event of their experience of distress, their wellbeing supersedes the research goals, and remind them that they may stop the tape, and/or the interview at any time. Confirm participant's understanding and agreement.

- Explain analysis and use of data, storage and security.
- Explain informed consent, anonymity and their right to stop taping/participating at any point. (nb. Include right to refuse to answer any question; right to pause or ask for tape to be turned off during interview; right to withdraw participation at any time)
- Review time commitment.
- Clarify their understanding of their rights and safeguards, and their desire to proceed.
- Obtain a signed informed consent form and give/leave a blank with participant.

***Preliminary Question Guide:***

1. Let's start with a bit of background: Tell me about the settings, cities, towns, or countries you have lived in prior to coming to UVic?
2. Tell me a bit about your family background. (parents, siblings, what it was like to be in your family. How would you describe your family's general attitude toward education. How would you see yourself and sharing and/or holding different values?)
3. Shifting to the beginning of your experience as a student at UVic: When you first came to UVic, what were your expectations? (Note: these may be academic, personal, social, etc.) To what extent have your expectations been met, and how? Have they been modified, and why?
4. In what ways are you different now, intellectually, from how you were when you entered UVic? What made you change, and how did it happen? What was your "old" way of thinking or being, vs. the "new" way? What did you move from and what did you move to? How did you know that a significant change had occurred?

5. What were the important things (or persons) that helped the process? What did the person do? What was the experience that catalyzed the shift? Were there any feelings that you remember as being part of the process?
6. Looking back, can you think of what might have helped you change (grow/learn) more? (How and in what ways?)
7. What about personal change – can you tell me how you have changed in your relationships since starting university? (Probe: dealing with conflict, tolerance for difference, emotional regulation)
8. In the last few years (at UVic) who, of all the people that you've known during that time, did you like the most? (if you've talked about partners or friends, is there someone you liked in a different way?)
9. Who, of all these people did you most want to be like? Did you become like them in any way? Of all the people you know now, who, if anyone, would you most like to be like?
10. How did you choose your major/program? When did you come to decide on that? Did you ever consider anything else? What or who were the major influences for you in this decision?
11. Can you think of a course that was particularly meaningful to you and describe it for me ? (eg., teaching, content, procedures, assignments, learning strategies)
12. Tell me about the role or contribution of the professor in that course (passion, expertise, caring, teaching ability). How did you participate in that class? Was it different from the way you participated in other classes? How? Why?

13. Have there been people (or one specific person) at UVic who have strongly influenced your career direction or goals? Tell me about them and how they influenced or guided you.
14. What do you currently plan to do with your degree? Tell me about your career plans at this point.
15. How do you see your education relating to your career path?
16. What do you see yourself as having learned about the world (global, social, environmental issues) in the disciplines you have studied?
17. What have you learned about your own strengths, skills, beliefs or values as related to your academic learning? How do you see those as contributing to your career development?
18. How do you imagine your future in the next year? In the next five years? How about in the next ten years?
19. As you look back, how are you the product of your family? How are you different from them?
20. How do you see your experience here (at UVic) as contributing to how you see yourself as similar or different from them (your family)?
21. What has been your philosophy over the rough spots of being a student here? How have you coped with stress?
22. How do you want your life to change in the future? In what ways do you hope to become different as a person in the future?

23. In what ways do you hope to contribute to the world as part of your life/career?
24. If there is anything else of unique significance in your experience of higher education, in terms of influences, experiences, or relationships, please describe them.

## Appendix H. Interview Prompts

**Interview prompts:**

Could you say more about...

Tell me more about...

Let's look at that....

I'm curious about...

I'm curious to know more about what that means.

Could we explore that a little deeper?

You mentioned ....what about... (opposites, surprises, exceptions)?

Is there anything else you'd like to add?...

What else can you tell me that would help me/you understand?

When you think about \_\_\_\_\_, what else comes up for you?

Attend to body language, breath, facial expression, pace, inflection as sources of further information.

## Appendix I. Participant Stories

### Sharon's Story

Sharon is an attractive and well-spoken young woman in her twenties. She is very nearly done her Business degree with an emphasis in Entrepreneurship. She spoke of growing up in a family that was strong and close and 100% supportive. Her family consists of her father, a college science professor, her mother, a physiotherapist, herself (the oldest) and her two sisters, the next oldest of whom is a national level biathlete.

Sharon's family moved from a tiny house in a small town in northern BC to Victoria when she was four years old, thanks to a position her father got at a local college. She laughed as she told of living, at first, on a busy road and having frightened her father by wandering out onto the road not long after they'd moved here. Even that frightening experience was described with an appreciation of the love and protectiveness her father felt, and humour at the lengths he went to to 'teach her' about the dangers of traffic. As Sharon speaks of her otherwise relaxed and strongly family-oriented growing up years, she acknowledges that she has greater appreciation now for the gift this has been. "The world is my playground and whatever I want to do, they are there to support me in it".

Sharon spoke of her parents' devotion to both her and her sisters. Always academically oriented, Sharon said she never felt pressured, she wanted to excel. As we explored her story, this theme of **excellence** and **achievement** wove throughout. One of their strongest family values is: "Whatever you do, engage 100%. As long as your heart is into it, then go for it". This included choosing her Business program and finding her 'passion' there.

Sharon described **morals** as another strong family value she shares. "People can sense if you're morally just or not...it was always drilled into us..." "And that people come before anything"...if you treat people well it will come back to you eventually seems to

underlie this value. Sharon says she has always been accepted and liked by people and attributes this to her strong morals. “I think people know I’m trustworthy”. Sharon seems to believe that this view is essential to her future career in business... “Business can be cutthroat at times. Family values influence me in that I know I don’t want to be one of those people who screw people over to get ahead”.

Other values that permeate Sharon’s story include **leadership, challenge** and attributes that she recognizes, like **perfectionism** and a **need for control**. As she described the many class projects she’s worked on, Sharon said she was always the group leader, even when she made a conscious choice not to lead...she smiled as she acknowledged that she likes things “done a certain way; I have a logical mind”. Sharon says her high expectations for herself require her to have one last look before something gets handed in... “I can’t just let someone else go hand it in – I need to go through it one last time”.

Sharon’s early expectations of UVic included socializing, having interesting conversations, going for lunch with more people. Here she was really disappointed and said, “It’s so hard to meet people here”. She described her perception that “people are here to learn,” and that she didn’t want to talk in class because she didn’t want to be disruptive. Entering the business program changed that, after her second year; then her social circles began to grow and close friendships developed.

Asked about her early learning experiences at UVic, Sharon said they were very intimidating. Isolation may have been part of this, but she acknowledged that academically she found it a “huge slap in the face.” This had the most to do with not feeling prepared for the demands, and, within that, time proved the biggest obstacle to overcome. Sharon said she always took five or six classes.

One of S’s most vivid memories is of her very first UVic exam: Micro economics, 200 students, 50 minutes, 35 multiple choice questions and 3 essay answers. Sharon described it with the detail and drama of an elite athlete describing their first major competition, including the feeling she was completely unprepared for what was

demanded of her. A distinct memory she carries vividly is of the professor rigidly enforcing the 50 minute rule, running up the auditorium stairs, grabbing a girl's paper and yelling at her.

Sharon believes that her achievement orientation and competitive spirit kept her from quitting. She described going home and crying over her papers, while her father comforted her and gently challenged her to have "Rhino hide," telling her that "they want to get rid of you. You're going to let them win?" Sharon said, "First and second year were the hardest things I've done."

By third year, Sharon felt like she had earned the right to be here, and the respect of her profs. She experienced that most in the faculty relationships that developed, allowing her to call profs by their first names, and hear their personal stories.

When asked about her learning, Sharon said that she "looks at school in a different way now." She described her learning as condensed, fast and broad (not deep): "They drag you across a whole load of subjects so fast and you just touch on an idea and don't really have any more time." While acknowledging that she chose to take a full and often heavy load, Sharon seemed to view her learning as exposure to ideas, which she can now "go back and research," rather than learning to think deeply and critically about a subject.

When asked what made her change in this process, Sharon said she had realized that "the faster and more you can know about yourself (challenge yourself), and what really makes you happy and makes you thrive, just grab on to that." She gained that insight through a painful relationship experience which challenged everything she had known about herself and believed about others. Sharon described an experience of love, betrayal and broken trust, sounding surprised at the intensity of experience, "It wasn't even a long experience, maybe four months, no big deal..." Looking back, Sharon saw it as the first "failure" she had ever experienced. What is fascinating is how Sharon dealt with that failure. She laughed as she recounted, "I don't know why but I thought, I want to do something..." Having spent the summer working at an isolated camp, Sharon unexpectedly finished

work ten days early. Here again Sharon's family and their rock solid support for her shone through her retelling: Her dad was on vacation time, just puttering. When she got home, she felt restless. Sharon asked her Dad, "What are you doing tomorrow?" "Oh, just yard work" "Do you want to bike to California with me?" "Okay, let's do it!" Ten days of gruelling physical challenge, but with her father, who believed in her, helped Sharon to begin to heal. She attributes that trip with helping her to realize that she could have stayed home but needed to learn to believe in herself again – "doing that sort of thing just slowly built my confidence back up."

Sharon acknowledges that she has always been the kind of person to "take it to the max." (taking 5-6 courses every term, taking harder subjects so she could keep her academic options open, choosing international coops and exchange experiences) But she also learned through that painful relationship experience that she had really never tasted failure before, something she couldn't control.

Something Sharon says she has also learned is to trust 'signs' or her gut instinct. She cites examples from school experiences (hated Biology), from Coop (why would I choose to talk to that one woman on that ferry about her career as an accountant?) chance conversation with the Dean of Business about the Entrepreneurship Program (he was so passionate about the...program, so I started researching it and realized this was totally what I want to do). This doesn't mean she doesn't do thorough research however, like talking to students who are articling or other already chartered accountants, but Sharon seems to recognize different needs and motivations as legitimate for others, but distinct from her own.

Sharon spoke of friends as having more of an influence on her career goals than faculty or staff. It was hard to think of just one person who influenced her career direction, as Sharon could identify different people for different 'kinds' of inspiration (friends for laughter and going out with, a marketing prof who is 'hilarious', the Dean because he's inspiring). When asked to identify one course that stood out for her, Sharon said *Organizational Behaviour* without hesitation. When pressed to say why, she said it was

different from all the other courses. It was the more psychological side of business, and it touched on ethics (morals), which resonated with Sharon's early family training. He told stories that were so mesmerizing Sharon hardly took notes, very unusual for someone whose pencil "does not leave the page" in most classes. He seemed to be able to connect theory to the 'real world' through his stories, something Sharon acknowledged would be much more difficult in a finance class. Sharon said it resonated on a "personal, passion level," so it seemed easy.

Sharon knows that she wants to own her own land development company. She dreams of working for a while in Vancouver to learn the business. She sees her degree as being broad and that she needs to focus her learning after grad. Sharon told another story of early childhood (she's a good story teller) where she and her best friend Carly would sit for hours in the sand box at their after school program, making neighbourhoods and landscapes, collecting rocks and trees and finding little people and cars to drive around on the roads they made. She laughed that even then she was competitive, trying to see who could make the best landscapes. "When I think about it, it's like a bigger version of that."

When asked about her learning about world issues – political, social, environmental – Sharon said she learned the most by going on exchange to another country where things are so different from here. She said she realized the world is so less globalized than she had thought, citing pollution, anti-western feeling, and unregulated business practices as examples of difference.

Sharon couldn't articulate how she hopes to contribute to the world in the future.

When asked how she sees her future – next year/5 years/10 years – Sharon cried, "I can't move beyond the next few months! Where am I going to live? That's hard!" This uncertainty is hard for someone who loves to set goals and achieve them.

When asked how she wants her life to change in the future, or to change herself, Sharon said, “I don’t want to be different; I’ve worked hard to be who I am. I just want to keep trying new things.”

## Jerry's Story

Jerry sees himself as an outsider. Born in Victoria, the first son of a father and mother who both worked in the banking system, Jerry spent his childhood after the age of five living in small communities on Vancouver Island. He has one younger brother who has just started at Malaspina University College in Nanaimo. Jerry describes himself as 'bookish,' a quality which made him aware of his sense of difference early in life. Jerry told stories that illustrated his feeling of 'not fit', from early school years, like not knowing the rules of hockey, something which attracted hostile attention in small town Campbell River when the Canucks were in the playoffs...

Jerry also describes himself as a 'contrarian,' saying that he has long known that he enjoys a good debate and often takes the 'opposite position just for the sake of taking the opposite position'. Jerry spoke of his schooling as powerful in shaping his interests and determination to work hard, but gives the impression that the source of those interests and work ethic lay in his own character and (*I wonder if they*) are also strongly valued in his family.

Jerry describes his competitive nature developing rapidly in middle school, where his friendship with another outsider, 'the only Chinese guy in town, who was also very bookish and was into math' fed and nurtured that competitive drive. Jerry was mightily chagrined once he got to high school, to realize that their competitive friendship resulted in tangible rewards at the end of grade nine, and that his friend had beaten his academic scores by .2%. Jerry can still remember the percentages of his high school marks to the decimal point, and smiled as he spoke of the pleasure of trying harder and beating out his friend in grades 10 and 11. Jerry was/is also a talented musician, and took his competitive spirit into band and other programs. He pursued this interest with the same intensity and competitive spirit as he did all his academic subjects, although he knew he had no interest in pursuing a musical career. Jerry stopped playing in bands at UVic when he felt it was becoming more of a chore, sucking 'the life out of me,' rather than giving 'me life.'

Another experience that was formative for Jerry was his father's enforced career change, when he was 'downsized' and let go by the bank. His father's struggle with his health (back problems requiring surgery) at a time when his mother had stopped working to raise their family, made things tight financially. Jerry said he knew that he either needed to work several jobs, take out loans, or earn scholarships in order to go to university. While he joked that working his 'buns off' was the 'easy way out,' Jerry acknowledged that there was a sort of 'workaholic atmosphere' in his home, so it was also the most familiar and, perhaps, highly valued route. Jerry also demonstrates strongly held opinions about 'worth' – such as – taking time off school to travel and see the world is not worth the cost in terms of dollars (resources expended) or delaying progress toward a career goal. Jerry also speaks of his self-perception as coming from the 'lower class,' having to work hard because he doesn't have the 'bank of mom or dad' behind him, and experiences great frustration with other students who cut corners on their learning because it's not that important to them and are funded by their parents or student loans. For him, the desire to learn exists for its own sake. Jerry also said his mother worked in the student loans area of the bank before she left the workforce and told stories of students 'buying pimped up stereos with their student loan money'. Jerry states that he is unique among his circle of friends in coming from a family where he is one of the first to attend university. This contributes to Jerry's belief that young people (students at UVic) do not realize how privileged they are.

Jerry described two incidents from middle school and high school which he says were highly formative, where his work ethic benefited others and he felt penalized. He stated having learned from those experiences (a grade 8 social studies project and a high school band fund raising car wash) that there was no justifiable reason for other people getting credit for his hard work. Jerry described this as having 'destroyed any good will he had towards working for the good of the collectivity or anything like that.' When asked how these formative experiences have shifted his thinking, Jerry spoke of becoming more individualistic. He expressed a powerful belief in seizing opportunities, not waiting to be 'streamed in' to a program.

Jerry acknowledges that his sense of his own difference was bolstered by his awareness of his intellect and that 'justified' his feelings (*which were...?*). This justification was challenged when Jerry met his friend J\_\_ who had higher test scores than he did, was as smart as he was, and had a much more outgoing (bubbly) personality. Jerry cites J\_\_'s ability to make friends as one of the traits he admires. He acknowledges that making friends is hard for him as he demands high levels of intelligence and knowledge in the people he surrounds himself with. Jerry sees his friend's ability to relate to more and different kinds of people as something he would like to have. Using examples from literature and media, Jerry illustrates his opinions with vignettes, quotes and stories. This broad knowledge is part of what Jerry desires in his friends, so that they understand his humour and his meaning.

Jerry says he doesn't feel he has evolved much at university, but rather has refined who he is. He admires profs who are very knowledgeable but not pretentious, who don't hide behind unnecessary complexity. He has learned to focus his own knowledge, citing writing research papers as a way he has learned to do massive amounts of research, something he has always done, but then focusing his argument more, and saying it in fewer words. Jerry acknowledged that he learned to be more concise only when he was threatened with academic penalty for writing too much.

Jerry has had a goal of practicing law for many years, long before he came to UVic. He says that, far from encouraging his goal, his thesis supervisor has discouraged him from his legal career goal, saying Jerry should become a military historian. Jerry cited statistical studies that show that a Master's degree in history will leave a graduate in a worse position than an undergraduate, because of the accrued debt load. Achieving his career goals and avoiding debt seem to be powerful motivators for Jerry. He loves proving an argument and 'being generally a bastard about it,' perhaps one of the motivators of his legal career goal.

## Jonathon's Story

Jonathon seems full of contradictions: he loves to learn what he calls 'useless information' but craves the applicable. He was blown away by Derrida's view of the world as deconstructed text, but says he is better at history because it's concrete. He can tell you the plusses and minuses of most things he's experienced, but says he's not so good at analysis. Let's start at the beginning...

Jonathon was born and raised in a small town on the coast of northern B.C. Coming from a small, northern, resource-based community seems to have significance for Jonathon. He expressed an internal sense of resisting popular conceptions that rural communities, northern communities are 'less intelligent' than southern, urban centres. This seems mixed with an awareness that his home, where both parents had earned university degrees, as well as teaching certificates, was "a little more sophisticated than it was around my other friends". Jonathon said his parents always taught him to learn and acknowledges that **education (and intelligence?)** is a strong value in his family.

Jonathon describes himself as the only child of his parents, though he has older half sisters from his father's first marriage, with whom he is close. **Family** is another strong value Jonathon can identify easily. He describes his father as a first generation Ukrainian immigrant, very close to his own brothers and sister. While only one other branch of the family has post-secondary education, Jonathon recognizes that **success** is important in his family and that he has always felt the pressure to succeed, particularly through **hard work**. Jonathon could easily cite the truisms he grew up with: "*you can spend time, you can spend money, you can always get money back.. Make the most of your time here...Hard work leads to salvation*". Jonathon says, "I think, myself, I'm not sure that concept really translated too well." Education is useful but it's a tool only. It's how you use it that counts.

Growing up, Jonathon read voraciously; his mother says he taught himself to read at a very early age. Always read to as a small child, Jonathon credits his lifelong love of

reading with that practice. He's looking forward to being finished with school, in fact, so he can read for pleasure once again. This love of reading seems to have fed the vast repertoire of "trivia, useless pop culture facts" stored in Jonathon's brain. Jonathon says he saw himself in high school as a very intellectual bohemian, always reading in the halls...now he's not so sure.

Jonathon's postsecondary education started at Simon Fraser in September 2002, where he went after graduating as valedictorian from his high school class. It was not a great beginning, not a particularly healthy atmosphere in residence, although Jonathon acknowledges the freedom he experienced to find, or lose himself in that anonymous first year. He very quickly states that his failure that year was "entirely" his own fault. Jonathon returned to Prince Rupert the next spring and went back to community college to retake his first year courses, with the intention of returning to Simon Fraser the following year. At the community college he seems to have felt both reminded of his ability and desire to excel, but also of the different demographic of that community. There was a range of adult learners in his classes, and Jonathon acknowledged that it was "not a competitive academic atmosphere." He seemed to miss that.

Jonathon ultimately didn't return to SFU because, in part, they didn't respond to his reapplication in a timely way, and because UBC didn't respond. His new girlfriend had applied to UVic, Jonathon did too, and was accepted here as a transfer student. That year, Jonathon says, was a good one. He lived off campus with a couple friends, while his girlfriend lived in residence. He made a few friends, but seemed to find a satisfying balance of school, relationship and keeping to himself. He worked hard enough to bring in grades in the B to A- range.

When asked how his expectations here have been met or not, changed or not, Jonathon said that in the areas of anonymity (he expected it), and academic challenge (his profs know a lot about a very focused area of knowledge), his expectations have been met. On the other hand, he says he doesn't have a relationship with any of his professors, particularly. Jonathon says he's burned out, has lost his desire to be the "best" student he

could be. He sees this now in part as a result of the ending of his relationship over the summer before his third year. Looking back, he sees that his involvement in a band and his choice to get really involved in his music as a way to cope with the loss of his relationship contributed to school not being on the “forefront” of his mind. He tried to keep on top and “eked out” decent grades, but saw it as maintaining. He describes his feeling as “dulled, less sharp in my ability to interpret new information” and attributes it to “not staying on top,” not throwing himself into the reading or “keeping up with that kind of mental exercise.” When asked about changes in his thinking, Jonathon sees himself as less confident academically now than when he started at UVic. What he sees as most different is his inability to care: “I don’t have the gumption or the drive anymore. And I can’t figure out why that is.”

Jonathon seems to blame himself for not keeping a healthy mindset following the break up; he feels like he went into “self-pity mode” and used the rock and roll lifestyle as a means of coping with the pain of the loss.

When asked about significant academic experiences, Jonathon spoke of a literary theory course he took with Dr. Ross. Part of the attraction going in seemed to be the level of challenge: “The teacher made it very clear that this was not for the squeamish.” Another significant aspect of his experience connected to his sense of the professor’s attitude toward his students. While the prof made it very clear that he didn’t care whether or not students excelled, Jonathon said he knew that Dr. Ross did care, not about their grades, but about their learning. Jonathon also seemed to respect Dr. Ross’s level of mastery for his very difficult subject matter. Another important difference in this course related to the very different kind of knowledge Jonathon was being introduced to. Studying the French philosopher Derrida, who viewed the world in terms of text, was one example; seeing his influence on thought at the time, and how it was reflected in things Jonathon had encountered before, helped him to make connections, to synthesize his earlier learning.

What Dr. Ross did that Jonathon found most helpful was first of all to have high expectations of his class – to communicate: only come here if you really want to understand this; also he laid out what he was going to cover in advance, then covered it (did what he said he was going to do?), then he supplemented that with his own illustrations (drew pictures) of difficult material, and assigned readings that complemented the whole. Jonathon acknowledged that Dr. Ross made Jonathon want to impress him. It felt important to learn the material, beyond the mark in the classroom, to help understand how people operate in the world through understanding the concepts. Jonathon acknowledged that this was the one class he almost always attended (admitting he's not "famous for attendance"), indeed often stayed after class and missed his next one because of the discussions that would often evolve from the lectures. Jonathon could contrast this with other courses where he thought they would be compelling, but then found them less interesting.

Jonathon could identify **respect** as something he had for a few professors, guys he "could take seriously." Respect seemed to combine a topic Jonathon could maintain interest in, with an awareness of the mastery that person had for their topic. Jonathon says it needs to matter to him...when asked what matters, he replied, "applicable knowledge." Jonathon is looking for knowledge that helps him understand the world he lives in, and the people who inhabit it. He identified Dr Ross as someone he respects and would like to emulate. Dr. Ross seemed to be one of the first people Jonathon has found who shares some aspects of Jonathon's "vast resource of ...knowledge, pop culture knowledge." Jonathon could see that as a cultural theorist, there actually might be something he could do with the kind of knowledge he has been drawn to and seems to store up...Jonathon agreed that this was one of the first academics who got Jonathon excited about the importance and relevance of what he already knew, and helped him to see possibilities, that it has applicability to the 'real world.'

Jonathon also spoke of Dr. Williams, who conducts his classes as conversations among peers. Jonathon mentioned a class on Ulysses, where Dr. Williams was able to use classroom discussion to demonstrate how the book worked, how it was constructed (the

system behind its construction?). (Question for J: Is it that you like understanding the way things work, how they work and why they are the way they are?) Jonathon said one of the comments Dr. Williams made on his major essay which was meaningful to him was “Why didn’t you talk this semester?” This was the semester after his relationship ended and Jonathon said it felt good that someone noticed, knew he was there.

Right now, Jonathon is looking for ways to learn more about how to apply his learning and knowledge to the world. He’s pretty certain that there won’t be a job posting for someone to analyze the meaning of the god narrator in TS Eliot’s work and knows there must be something out there besides teaching, he’s just not clear how to figure those applications out. After all, education is a tool, it’s how you use it that counts. Having said that, Jonathon is considering applying to a post degree education program at another university at this time.

## Heidi's Story

When Heidi looks back, she sees her life unfolding in cyclic patterns. Born in Drumheller, Alberta, the oldest of four children, Heidi said she lived there until she was seven, then moved to Ottawa for five years, then to Abbotsford through high school (5 years?), and has been at UVic for five years. A deeply reflective person, Heidi has just noticed this pattern of transitions. While each of those moves has engendered loss, they have also brought new opportunities and growth. It brings to mind the metaphor of creatures who shed their “homes” as part of their growth cycle.

Born to parents who work very hard, Heidi says she can see her own **work ethic** coming from them, not so much from what they said, as what they demonstrated. This is true of Heidi's value for **relationships** as well. She is very clear that **being a good person, being honest, dependable, responsible and kind** are very important values that were modelled for her. These were evidenced by **good listening, 'being there for people', and being accepting and empathetic.**

In fact, Heidi just realized recently that her father, who started out his work life at the penitentiary having barely finished high school, has risen through the system to a position of national authority. He is doing the job of someone who is supposed to have a PhD, through sheer hard work. It is ironic that his lack of credentials will not allow him to remain there. Heidi describes her mother also as a very hard worker who changed careers, went back to school five or six years ago and has now become a teacher. Heidi sees her so differently now, and says she wonders if her mother actually has had a transformation, or if it's Heidi's growth that's evident.

Heidi says she's always known she would go to university – ‘it was always a given,’ but doesn't remember her parents ever telling her that. One of her younger brothers is working and taking part time college courses, choosing a different path. Heidi sees her younger sister as more similar to herself and expects her to attend university right after high school.

Choosing a university was challenging for Heidi. Not knowing which programme she wanted to do, she applied to six schools and six different programmes. She chose UVic, she reflects now, probably because her boyfriend was accepted into Engineering here. Looking back, Heidi sees the decision to leave home and come to UVic as the beginning of many personal changes. She sees herself as cautious, a homebody by nature. When that relationship ended three weeks into the first semester, Heidi still can't quite believe that she carried on the way she did. This negative experience was a huge catalyst to subsequent growth. There appears to be an overall **pattern of challenging herself**, Heidi's old self-labels: "I'm a homebody," "I don't like change," "I get discouraged easily," "I'm a timid girl," "I have social anxiety" no longer line up with the woman who consistently engaged thoroughly on academic and personal levels, being strategic and intentional in seeking out volunteering and work opportunities, and developing social support networks. It appears to be one of the most pervasive and consistent underlying themes of Heidi's experience. She's still not sure how she did it, but acknowledges that 'One connection led to another. Through that experience I found out about this. It was just a big network, it turned out to be.'

Heidi says that her most transformative growth experience occurred away from UVic. She took a semester off, to work and save for, then to experience a trip to England and Ireland with her boyfriend, G. When she returned to school, Heidi knew something had changed. She remembers that she came back to school thinking, "I'm not the same as I was in my first year, and I knew it". Heidi says she didn't decide to be different so much as she discovered herself wanting different things, like working harder academically, and staying home on weekends. She describes it as self-trust, not needing to depend on her friends to feel okay about herself.

One influencing factor she acknowledges is her long distance relationship with her boyfriend, G. This relationship has lasted over three and a half years and functions as what Heidi describes as "a rock in my life," allowing her to have a good, productive university life, time and freedom to study, work, volunteer. Heidi acknowledges that

both of them are in a place of significant transition right now, each involved in “figuring out better” who they are becoming.

When asked about significant relationships on campus that fostered her growth and learning, Heidi hesitated because “there are so many” and they were in different contexts.

Heidi identified one professor whom she “really enjoyed,” a psychology prof who taught Health Promotion. Some of the key characteristics of that relationship seemed to involve shared interests (in health promotion), a sense of being seen and recognized as a good student and a **hard worker** (value). This professor **made himself available for conversations** (value), supported Heidi in exploring options in the health field. He also had some qualities that Heidi appreciated, such as **kindness** (value) and **pride in his work** (value). He expressed passion for his work that was apparent in his teaching. Heidi remembers working very hard in that class, “we were responsible for so much, not only readings but had to teach the class”. The two girls in her presentation group were a year ahead of her and Heidi says “it was kind of like our own little counselling group.” In there they shared many conversations about their futures, careers and further education. Heidi remembers going off to research options and then returning to share what she’d found. She sees this now as having been a catalyst, not only for her academic learning but also for her discovery that what she was interested in and passionate about had a name: Occupational Therapy.

Heidi says that throughout her education she has pursued her interests consistently, wondering about changing sometimes, but always moving forward toward a BSc. In the last year, “all the pieces have come together.”

When asked about what she’s learned about the world, Heidi said that “it’s not a happy world out there” and that her learning made her sad/low.

When asked about her self-learning (strengths), Heidi said she has become more confident in her abilities, to believe that maybe she’s a little bit “above average.” One

source of great pride and fulfillment for Heidi is her accomplishment of this education through her own hard work; she's paid her own way, and wishes that accomplishment could be reflected on her transcript. Heidi attributes some of her sense of achievement and increased confidence to knowing that she got through it paying her own way and volunteering at the same time.

Heidi says she's learned a lot also about what she needs/wants in a work environment through her work experiences. She cited a government job in which she felt ill prepared and unsafe, a campus job in which she felt unsupported and poorly supervised as negative learning experiences. She contrasted these with the last couple working environments where she was working in areas where she's well suited (brain injuries) and feels supported and respected (research/work study). Heidi says she now knows she needs a "good" work environment in which to thrive. She describes that as working independence, support from coworkers and supervisors, a lot of feedback, constructive and positive, friendly environment with coworkers, respect, there'd be work itself that's semi-challenging, not the people, just a lot of support where supporting each other.

When asked about challenges, Heidi said that she still has a hard time finding balance and struggles with "what I'll put up with" or accept in others. This seems to connect to her hard work and goal directedness, and to a difficulty discriminating between play that is rejuvenating and goofing off. Heidi said, 'at work I'm always wondering how much fun is too much fun. I have a problem with self-care and the time I do take for self-care, whether it is actually good for me.'

When asked about regrets, Heidi said she wishes she had gotten to where she is now "faster," she feels like she's just figured out how to excel "and it's all over." Heidi acknowledged, "it takes me a while to believe in myself." Heidi's life/career goals currently include completing her Occupational Therapy degree (H was accepted at UBC a few weeks after these interviews), maybe travelling or working internationally, then settling down to a career and creating a family. More cyclic patterns unfolding?

## Pami's Story

Pami is already a citizen of the globe. She will tell you that she has lived in many, many countries. Born in Thailand, to parents who are both government officials, Pami is the older of two daughters. From the age of four she began her journey, first to Saudi Arabia, then to Kuwait at the age of eight. Between eight and twelve the family lived back in Thailand. Then at fourteen or so, the family moved to Israel, returning to Thailand for Pami's high school years. After so many years in international schools, Pami says she didn't adjust well to Thai schools and so stayed in the international school system until she came to Canada, to UVic, three years ago. Pami smiles as she explains that she's been told she has an American accent, even though she has never been to the States, a legacy of attending American schools all over the world.

When asked about her family, Pami says that her father was posted abroad, mostly to the Middle East, because of there being so many Thai workers in that part of the world. Her mother, says Pami, 'put her work at the side and followed.' Pami's sister is eight years younger, and Pami describes their relationship as 'more superficial', that she feels more like a parent or an authority figure than a 'fun friendship figure.' Recently Pami has become aware of wanting to shift this to a more open, sibling relationship. Probably one of Pami's strongest values is **independence - not relying on people, and being strong**. Pami says she learned about that value partly from living in so many different countries and having to make friends over and over, and partly from her parents, who Pami now thinks, wanted to keep their female daughters independent and career oriented. Another value Pami holds is that of the importance of **family**. She expresses pride in her family dynamic, the openness she shares with her parents. Pami says she feels she can talk about most anything with her parents. **Education** is also important to Pami. She says it has always been her top priority, and recognizes the privilege she had in her education. Her younger sister went back into Thai schools, where Pami continued to attend international schools which cost a lot of money.

Pami speaks of the collectivist nature of her culture, and its influence of her choices and decisions. Although Pami says her parents never overtly pressured her, she feels pressure. They have never demanded excellence, but Pami feels her obligation to them, 'because they put so much into me and I can see it.' Interestingly, her major of Psychology came about very quickly after Pami realized that the Business degree she thought she should do would not make her happy. Pami initially aimed for a Business degree at UVic because 'everybody in Thailand' is doing a Business, Engineering or Science degree. Even though she had won an award for Business in her International Baccalaureate Program, when she got to UVic and started courses, it was when her partner said, "I can see that you're very unhappy in this class that you're taking... what do you really, really want to do?" that Pami felt she could turn to her other passion, Psychology. When she told her parents, she said they responded, "great, yeah, that's wonderful." Having that support has been a critical part of Pami's experience, even though she has made every decision herself.

Once Pami got started in Psychology, she never looked back. Pami says she never expected to have the research experience, or the 'hands on' learning that she is gaining now. This is very different to Asian education as Pami knows it. Pami says that her experience here happened because she found opportunities. It started off with a course that Pami found really interesting: Neuropsychology. Taught by someone who Pami describes as one of her favourite professors, Pami said that reading about the subject, looking through articles got her excited. She said that the first course she took from him was his first teaching assignment and he was very, very shy. She found what she enjoyed most to be the content of his lectures, his ability to make something so complex 'look simple.' 'He uses lots of food examples'...Pami says she's always hungry in his class.

What appealed to Pami most about Neuropsychology was its balance between two things she's good at: memorizing and making acronyms, and looking at relationships between things, what causes what. In addition it deals with mechanisms in the brain, something Pami says because it was new, stimulating and dynamic (unlike Math...)

One of the people who influenced Pami a lot at UVic, was Tricia, the Staff Coordinator of the Peer Helping Program. Arriving at UVic during the summer, Pami and her partner stayed in Residence for a month. They saw a poster for the Peer Helping Program and Pami says she knew it would be a way to meet people so they signed up and had their interviews. Pami says that when she met Tricia at the Fall Training Retreat, and observed her interacting with the other volunteers, she saw that Tricia had a way of being ‘in the moment, of tuning in with that person.’ Pami said she really wanted to be like her. Looking back, Pami says she owes a lot of her social experiences, and her current confidence level to that modelling and mentorship. Pami remembers that when she first arrived at UVic, she found it hard to find a suitable way to interact with people. As an international student, Pami was highly motivated to learn how to communicate with people in a way that showed that she was genuinely interested in them, not simply as a skill to be acquired but also as a quality she valued.

Some of Pami’s most valued learning while at university include a broader perspective: ‘I’m not as narrow minded as I used to be’. Pami can see where she used to get stuck in the details of right/wrong thinking. Pami says she’s learned to accept that there are many explanations for some things. Now she questions, doesn’t just take things at face value; she’s learned to become her own ‘devil’s advocate.’ Pami says one course in particular contributed to this learning shift. An undergraduate interpersonal communication course required Pami to write multiple papers in which she was challenged to ‘reflect on her thinking.’ Pami says that, at first, she didn’t know how to do that, but after about five such papers, she feels she progressed each time. Pami says that the more she thinks about the way she’s thinking, the clearer she becomes about the assumptions she’s working on. Exploring beliefs and values and assumptions underlying her thinking was ‘a very good activity’ for Pami. Sharing conversations with peers, classmates and colleagues has also been a big part of Pami’s learning to be more reflective.

A major disappointment for Pami has thrown her academic dreams off track, a bit. Pami enjoyed her Neuropsychology professor so much, (and she admits to a sometimes self-defeating belief that everything has an easy solution) she was devastated when she

learned he already had an honours student this year. For a while she felt let down and angry and considered leaving her interest in biological sciences behind, but lately, it's coming back. Even though another motivating figure in her UVic experience, Dr. Joe Parsons, has lots of ideas for Pami, and has really opened her eyes to the possibilities she could explore as career options, Pami finds herself keeping the door open to the possibility of delaying her graduation and seeing if she could talk to that prof again. Lots of factors to consider here keep Pami feeling like she's in limbo: Money is an issue as her international student scholarship will expire soon. Pami feels as though her university education has been rushed, with events pushing her into different areas...sometimes she feels as though that has prevented her from developing what she 'really' wants to do.

Because of this, Pami says that, right now she has 'a generic answer for everything,' when people ask her about her career. She'll say 'something in the health field'. She knows she wants to go back to Thailand and contribute something, but what that something will be she can't yet say. What is clear, though, is that Pami has learned much about herself and has developed her confidence to know that, whatever that contribution may end up being, she has the ability to do what she sets her mind to.

Pami says that she has grown to appreciate more about her culture, its strengths, and its influence on her as she learns and experiences more about people, knowledge, and life in a university halfway round the world. Pami is a citizen of the globe who feels the pull to go home and give back.

## Julia's Story

Julia says she's seeking symbolic closure to her degree. She is a person who's hungry for growth. Julia exhibits an intense need to challenge herself; it seems connected to a need to accomplish maximum growth. At this point of transition, Julia says she hopes to use this conversation to facilitate part of the closure she feels she needs for this chapter of her life.

Born to a public health nurse mother and a chiropractor father, Julia has lived in Victoria, in the same house, for her whole life. She has one older sister, three and a half years older, and describes their family as "very close", especially her mother, sister, and herself. Dad gets left out a bit "just because he's a guy", but Julia feels overall that she had a pretty stable and happy childhood.

When asked to talk about values in her family of origin, Julia starts with the importance of **family**, both immediate and extended. Another value which she articulates immediately although with more difficulty is **happiness**, which she describes as "doing what you need to do to make yourself happy" or "**being true to yourself**" (and becoming the best person you can be?). That complex definition seems to include developing **integrity, honesty, valuing relationships, and contribution or helping others**. This seems to connect also to **caring**, for self and others, both "individualistic and collectivist". Another strong value is **education** as a means to create that change in self (**personal growth? achievement?**), and **contribute to positive change around one**. Julia includes **critical thinking** as a valued tool for democracy and self protection, to help you "stand up for yourself." Although she did not articulate it, a value of **hard work** was also evident, "we still work hard ...to get scholarships" ... "I work very hard in the summer, 6-7 days a week" ... "I just wanted more." While Julia respects that her parents want to support her and her sister totally throughout their education and some of her desire to work hard seems connected to that appreciation, it also seems to be intrinsically part of how she engages in all her learning and relationships.

Julia can remember that when she arrived at UVic she was *so* excited. Julia remembers being very ready to jump in at UVic and get involved. Coming from a positive high school experience with lots of extracurricular activities and an involvement in leadership, Julia ‘hit the ground running.’ She attributes some of this to her older sister, whose experience and advice she happily took hold of. Some she also attributes to her family’s unquestioning belief that Julia would find her place here (at UVic). Julia says she listened to every bit of advice she got, from her sister, sister’s friends, and high school counsellors. Her conversation is sprinkled with, “and I did that,” and “I’ve met those expectations.” One of the first things Julia did was the Summer Learning Skills Program, most useful, she says, because it helped her “get used to the campus.” By the time classes started, she could find her way around, had been introduced to the library, and knew the names of 30 people. This helped her know somebody in almost every class, even though some of them were huge.

Julia says she learned quickly that five courses a semester would interfere with extra curricular engagement, so she cut down to four courses by January of her first year. She also began to recognize that Sciences, which she had chosen because she thought she wanted to become a neurosurgeon, didn’t ignite passion. Here again her older sister recommended she try a Psychology course, and when she tried it, Julia realized that she had found the right discipline. Julia acknowledges that she knew it was going to be challenging, and that she took initiative to make things happen, but she acknowledges the role of supports like her sister and family in helping her to make the right choices.

When Julia talked about academic learning, her passion became evident again. Switching from Sciences to Psychology has been good for her undergrad, but her need to have a personal career goal, and passion around that goal, was sparked in an English course for Science students. Julia’s enthusiasm showed as she described her experience of a debate over an article they were asked to read. Her prof’s organization of the debate provided an opportunity for Julia to engage in a passionate and stimulating intellectual discussion. When she arrived home that night, her mother listened and made a comment about **law school**. That comment sparked Julia to dive into researching her options learn more

about it, giving her the momentum (and a replacement goal) to help her let go of Sciences and medicine.

Julia's momentum and intensity are evident here as she describes researching careers, immediately doing an informational interview with a lawyer (and has more planned), and going online to register for more psychology courses.

Some of the co-curricular programs Julia has participated in have offered her opportunities to learn from different people, and to learn diverse ways of thinking. Julia says this has contributed to her appreciation for diversity. She experiences herself as more open minded now, in part because of her work with international students, orientation programs, and peer helping.

The course of Julia's academic experience changed dramatically in the fall of her second year, and this has also had a profound impact on Julia's learning, and perhaps on her life course. Going to the doctor one day in November, Julia had the experience of finding herself in hospital with a life threatening diagnosis within 24 hours. Going from full speed/full participation to full stop and uncertainty for her future changed her in many ways. Foremost among those is Julia's recognition of what's important, and what's not. Julia says she now has a strong appreciation for quality relationships. She says that she learned very quickly who was a true friend, and who didn't call or make time. Some of the surprising places where Julia discovered she did matter, was to some of her professors. She realized that, although the university is a bureaucracy, some of her professors went out of their way to reach out to her, by writing her a letter in hospital, or making a CD of some extracurricular lecture material for her. Julia says she also learned that some friends were not really friends, and now distinguishes in her own mind between friends and acquaintances. Her awareness of her values, for example, is much clearer now. Julia says that, while intellectually she's more open minded, she is more able to step back now and say, "That's one way of thinking and it's not the way I think" This was exemplified by her recently telling her (now) ex-boyfriend, who told her money was more important than all relationships, never to call her again.

Learning through relationships has been a significant part of Julia's personal learning journey while at UVic. Her recent ex-boyfriend of 3.5 years, another "high achiever," has helped her to learn (painfully) the cost of high achievement motivated by the wrong values (money, power, pressure to perform at any cost). Julia says that she has only recently come to realize that **respect** is one of her primary values for relationships. She expresses the wish that she had not wasted so many nights crying over that relationship during her degree. Another of Julia's values is for **self-learning**, that ability to learn from your mistakes and choices. Julia is uncomfortable with her estimate of her personal learning here – she has recognized that she has the ability to cut people off when she has to, "I don't like the fact that I'm able to do it so easily", but she recognizes that her choices have been made out of a survival place (while recovering from her life-threatening illness); she'd like more flexibility in that choosing.

Julia seems philosophical, but also a little sad as she talks about how she sees the worth in coming through her illness and recovery with wisdom and insight beyond her chronological years. She seems a little wistful about her lost naïveté (innocence?) and childlike enthusiasm, confidence, and trust. She points out that that "over-confidence" and enthusiasm helped her to create the bonds that aided in her enduring her illness (though family also played a huge role here). Julia still has mixed feelings about having had to learn to monitor her energy and choose her activities so much more carefully than before. She can see that her identity was wrapped up in her **achievements** and perceived **indomitable strength**, "a lot of people think that slowing down and asking for help is not me."

**Pride** surfaced as a factor in Julia's learning process, in her healing. Julia said that it took her 'a whole year' to begin her emotional healing, that she didn't see the connection between her physical and emotional growth in the healing process. She expresses recognition of "it was good for me to have it then" (the learning/the challenge to her identity) but acknowledges that, at times, it is still hard for her to see the gift in getting "help" and slowing down "that much." Julia says she knows that when she chooses

something now, it's because it's important to her, not because she doesn't want to miss anything. "It's more quality over quantity." This clearly contributes to Julia's seeking closure, her stated readiness to move on to another chapter in her life.

When asked what might have contributed to more learning or growth, Julia says that living on her own, rather than at home, might have spurred more growth, but she acknowledges that, given her circumstances, that simply wasn't possible. Other experiences Julia feels she's missed out on include exchanges, something that might have offered her more chances to explore herself in the world. Because of that 'loss,' Julia intends to write her LSATS, then travel and work for a year before applying to law schools.

When talking about influences, Julia says that her mother has clearly been the biggest influence in her life. The experience of going through her illness, rather than strengthen the mother/daughter roles, seems to have brought them to a place of mutual respect as two adult women. Julia believes that her mother's witnessing of Julia's fight for her life, and for her right to shape her experience of illness and recovery, helped her to respect Julia's ability to "stand up for [her]self." Another factor in her family life is the closeness shared by the women in her family. While Julia has grown closer to her mother and grandmother, and shares much with them, she acknowledges that her relationship with her older sister, who also experienced a life-threatening car accident within months of Julia's health crisis, has – as a matter of protecting self and other – become a little more boundaried. Julia says it was a conscious choice they made to make their lives more parallel, less intertwined. She says she thinks it 'bugs' her sister sometimes that Julia has, eventually, been able to get back up, be 'competitive' again, while she continues to struggle with the aftermath of her accident.

Other significant influences include two male friends, twin brothers who have been friends with Julia since just before she came to UVic. These two men, friends of Julia's ex-boyfriend, have been important role models for Julia. They have stuck by her as friends, have shared "fundamental morals." Although they were raised in a different

religion, Julia says they also value similar things, like ‘learning for learning’s sake.’ Her experience of illness and her recovery process has, she says, “taken the gender away a bit.”

Julia’s need for maximum growth will always be part of her momentum, it seems that monitoring her evolving self will always be an important component of her growth, perhaps helping her to choose pace, quality of experience, and course on her life journey.

## Anita's Story

Anita is a passionate, complex and deep-thinking young woman. Diversity is a word that describes her interests, her world view and her fascination with people's experience in the world. Born in the lower mainland of BC, Anita lived in another suburb of Vancouver until she came to Victoria to attend UVic. Anita was born to Indo Canadian immigrant parents, and has one sister, six years older. Anita says that living in a small community with a tiny Indo Canadian community, she felt she had a different experience of Indo Canadian culture than her sister or parents, who had had the experience of the "huge" Indo Canadian community on the lower mainland for much longer than Anita. This different experience was reinforced by Anita's small ("dinky") private school which had a very diverse population for such a small town. Looking back, Anita can see that experience of diversity throughout her education had a huge impact on her learning interests and subsequent career goals. It seemed to have created the experience of a true global village, with a small group of children from many different cultures growing up together.

Anita can say without a doubt that she gets her **strong work ethic** from her parents. She describes her dad's refusal to allow her or her sister to pay for their school, or to take out student loans: "This is my job," he says. "This is what I'm going to do." Anita has watched both her parents work very hard; her father still works seven days a week, 12 hours a day. Anita expresses great appreciation for their devotion to making **education** a major priority in their lives. Because Anita has no other relatives in BC, **family** as a value means just the four of them. This was put to the test when Anita's sister married a Caucasian and she had to watch those family values tested as her parents struggled to control, then accept her sister's decision. Now, Anita says, the value has prevailed and they have embraced him. Another strong value in her family is **culture**, and **language**. Anita speaks Punjabi at home. **Religion** was a strong value for Anita's parents, but it's one she hasn't developed, saying she's more "in the middle". She acknowledges however, that, if asked, her parents would describe her as religious.

Anita speaks candidly and with highly developed self awareness of her struggle to find her **cultural identity**, growing up with conservative traditional values in her home and more liberal westernized values in her school and outside community. Anita describes herself **growing up as “two people”**, one at home and one in the community. University has allowed her to surround herself with people who understand and relate to her as a **unique being**. She’s developed her own context here and speaks of the “**hybrid culture**” she and her sister have created for themselves. Anita says that not sharing information with her parents actually had a positive impact on her decision making as an adolescent. “I always made good decisions because I knew that my parents didn’t know what I was doing.” Anita describes the compromises she made with herself, like going out, but not drinking or doing drugs. When she graduated from grade 12, she snuck out to the after-grad party because she wanted to be there with her friends, but she knew that her parents would have forbidden it, so, in a sense, she says she made an internal compromise and did not drink. Anita says that her sister has been a huge support in her life, particularly as they grew up and wanted relationships and experiences which would have been frowned upon or forbidden. This developed into watching each other’s back. It seems to have created greater honesty and trust between them as they carefully crafted what their parents could know or not know of their ‘other’ lives. As Anita says, “she’s the only person who completely understands what it was like to live in my house”. This experience seems to have had a great impact on Anita’s sense of justice. Her **struggles to find her own voice** have fuelled in some way her **passion to help others find their voices**. Anita says she came to UVic knowing she wanted to be a counselor and get into psychology. It was when she started taking Women’s Studies courses, though, that who she wanted to help, and how, began to crystallize. While some of her **social justice** values come in part through her father’s influence, like her understanding of the situation that minority immigrants face in trying to succeed in a country like Canada, some of them are uniquely hers. Anita uses her education and volunteer experience to help her **understand** things like sex trade, poverty and violence. Here her values clearly diverge from those of her parents. These differences are part of why Anita knows she won’t live at home after finishing university. Distance allows her to respect their differences without resenting them.

When Anita first came to UVic, one of the hardest parts of her adjustment was to Residence life. While she grew up in that small school environment where there was much tolerance among her peers, Anita found that not wanting to party or drink was a huge impediment to meeting people. While Anita has met lots of people during her time here, she acknowledges that she's quite shy with those she doesn't know well, and she feels like lots of those relationships stay superficial. There are very few friends that Anita knows she'll stay connected to beyond UVic, and she sees this as one major difference between her experience (at UVic) and her sister's (who also attended UVic). While her sister has all her closest friends from her university days, Anita feels like her closest friends, beyond her "best friend" whom she met in Res that first, lonely year, are from her high school. She sees UVic as a place where it's easy to get lost. This has also taught Anita about what she wants and values in her **relationships**. She says she came to UVic expecting to develop a "huge social network", and is leaving knowing that she needs to count as friends, people with whom she can be completely **honest**, and share conversations that have **depth**, aren't just superficial.

As she talks about her courses, Anita makes a distinction between her Women's Studies experiences and her Psychology experiences. Right from first year, Anita experienced the difference, in class size, in content, and in the ways that students were engaged. She gives examples relating to feedback (or lack of it), exams and essays where she learned about thinking critically. In her experience of Psychology, Anita says it was mostly "regurgitation", "multiple choice mentality", and while she can understand why that might be so, with the numbers of students, her most significant learning experiences were in those small, "forced participation" classes, where people seemed to be there because they wanted to participate. Anita said that in some Psych courses, she has learned that you can actually take really interesting material and turn it into a counterproductive learning experience. There are also examples of very positive learning experiences for Anita in Psych, most of them being in the fourth year, seminar style classes. One example of these was Dr. Cressey's interpersonal skills course. What made it stand out were things like finding her own articles on topics she found interesting. In every class there

was an expectation that ‘you’d have to show up and talk about a topic’. Anita says she learned ‘way more’ in that class than in most others. Being made responsible for part of the curriculum seems to have contributed to the power of that learning experience. When asked if she experienced a distinction between her psychology learning and her ‘activist’ learning, Anita said, ‘I don’t so much because I think they’re so interrelated. Because you can’t really have one without the other’.

Another highlight of Anita’s learning has been one of her upper level Women’s Studies courses. Clearly **the connection between theory and the ‘real world’, understanding that world is part of what excites Anita**. She described her experience working with immigrant and refugee women at Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre (VIRCS) as In one Racialization class she described becoming so curious about a topic that she began to conduct her own academic research, looking in journals, finding books, and talking to people about her learning and understanding, checking their perceptions and lived experiences against the academic interpretations she’d read.

This **ability to discern, to analyze and evaluate knowledge** is one of the things Anita values most in how she’s changed while being a student at UVic. Christine St. Peters is a professor who has significantly influenced her university experience. In the classroom and as a practicum supervisor, Anita says she has felt encouraged, cared about, and respected. Anita identifies mentorship as a quality she values highly in the people she has learned the most from.

Anita needs to challenge, and to feel challenged. Whether it is in the context of a class examining privilege, or doing her own research because she’s hungry to understand, Anita has a need to contribute. Her goals include work in NGO’s, a post-grad program in career and work counselling, life experience and then grad school for counselling psychology. Anita demonstrates an interesting combination of **clarity of vision** about her passions with an **openness to possibilities** that promises a diverse and rich career. She also demonstrates a set of concrete skills in identifying options and managing her

opportunities – she attributes these to her lifelong (at least since high school) **resourcefulness** around researching her options to ‘make a plan’.

## Nansi's Story

Nansi is a **natural facilitator**. She describes herself as someone who **loves being around people and facilitating learning, especially in children**. Right from an early age, she says she loved **teaching**. Nansi is a **social** being who thrives in her created **community**.

Born and raised in a small town in northern B.C., with a population under 4,000 people, Nansi describes herself as a **first generation Canadian**. She has one brother, four years older. Her father came to Canada from India when he was 21 and her mother came when she was 13. Growing up in a family where her mother left high school at grade ten and her father came to Canada with a Bachelor's degree in Education, Nansi says she has always been aware of her parents' value for **education**. She says her father, who works at the mill in Houston, is "all about the education, all about going to school and all about life experiences". He has continued to take courses and teaches courses at the mill. Her mother, whose father died when she was six months old, came to Canada to live with her oldest brother, leaving her invalid mother behind in India. Nansi says her mother values education because she sees that it's the path to a better life for her children. Working as a cook in a restaurant, she tells her children, "Oh you don't want your mother's life..." Nansi says she understands this now she has left home, but recognizes that she didn't understand it growing up. Now "it kind of keeps me going". Nansi speaks of the stresses of living in a tiny Indian immigrant community within a small town in northern BC. She couldn't wait to leave home when she finished high school. Because most of her friends at home were Caucasian, her parents views, which she now sees as "not very traditional", seemed very different from other children's family views. She and her brother, she says, have had many conversations about managing their friendships around their parents' more traditional views of what was acceptable.

When she first came to UVic, N says she had "the Hollywood image of university", "Res life, like all the parties, the nice big buildings, the sororities..." Nansi says coming from such a small town she felt "naïve", "isolated from the world". Her first semester was

very hard, she says, “really tough”. Her best friends now come from those early days, where she met other girls on her floor, who also came from small towns and could identify themselves as different from the girls who came from bigger cities; “they had a lot more street smarts”. Even though there were times during that first semester when Nansi thought she wanted to go home and transfer to UNBC, she sees that she’s had different learning experiences because she stayed. Nansi was motivated to come to UVic because she knew she wanted to leave her small community (which she now appreciates for what it offered her growing up), and her friends, who mostly went to UNBC. Nansi is aware now of how making that choice has broadened her options and enlarged her network of friends. Understanding and appreciating diversity are now more important to Nansi, who finds that UVic is .

When Nansi first got to UVic there was lots of drinking in Res, especially that “first weekend”. Nansi says she could actually smell the alcohol in the air when she got onto campus. That’s when she knew she wasn’t ready for that kind of lifestyle. “I hated it, I hated it so much”. Nansi says she cried herself to sleep a lot. What helped Nansi get over this, she says was “**letting go**” of that “**fear**”, “fear of the big city, the fear of being along, the fear of being away from my family, my friends”. Nansi started meeting people in the cafeteria, in her classrooms, and the more people she met the more comfortable she got. One of her best friends, who also came from a small BC town, helped her accept herself and get more comfortable here. “We both kind of helped one another just like establish our identity”.

Her university experience has helped Nansi understand transitions in general. She’s beginning to understand that there will always be other, different transitions, but says she’s more confident now. Having **challenged herself** and made it through, Nansi seems to feel more comfortable with herself. Even knowing she is a person who **doesn’t like change** seems to help a little. Nansi knows that she is a person who is **cautious**, and who **likes to plan out her life carefully**, one or two years at a time. One thing Nansi says will always stay constant with her is her **positive outlook on life**. N is always “looking on the bright side of things”. Another thing that helped Nansi adjust is her

strong sense of her own **spirituality**. Nansi talks to God when she needs to. Another time she needed to talk to God a lot was when her grandmother, whom she describes as “my best friend”, passed away last year. While it was very painful, and still provokes strong emotions, Nansi says going through it mostly on her own has helped her understand herself. It was a time when no one, friends or family, could really understand what she was going through. “I was the person that, I myself helped me through it”. When asked how she did that, Nansi says meditating, talking to God and writing in her journal helped “a lot because I like to get my thoughts on paper”. Nansi says when she reads her journal she realizes that she counsels herself, and “**I solve my own problems**”.

Nansi has changed her thinking about “culture” since coming to UVic. This has been influenced by her experiences and her studies in History and French. Nansi says that, where she used to think that she and her parents shared a culture when she was growing up, she now believes that they have very different cultures. Nansi is “very proud” of being Canadian and “so proud of being Indian”. She acknowledges that, at the same time, it can be a challenge. Some of Nansi’s first generation Indo-Canadian friends, for example, tell her she’s too ‘whitewashed’, yet compared to some of her Caucasian friends, Nansi reflects more conservative, perhaps Indian values such as no sex before marriage. What Nansi is clear about is that her **experience of her own culture is unique to her**, and will probably evolve with her throughout her life.

Nansi speaks of a summer immersion experience in Quebec where she met people from many different cultures, religions and ethnicities. Nansi is proud of the fact that she went “on my own”, which she knew would force her to “find” a good friend. Called “*J’explore*”, N says there were no minorities because there was such a range of people “from all sides of the world”. Nansi particularly values having been around all those people, “**learning about their struggles and their family values and how they grew up and relating or not relating**”. She loves **learning about different cultures** and says that living with diverse friends, not just sitting in a classroom learning “about the Chinese

or the middle east” you “learn a lot more”. Nansi thinks that having the opportunity to interact with more diverse groups of people at UVic might have made her experience here richer, “more worldly”.

When asked to talk about significant people in her experience at UVic, Nansi had lots to choose from. “Professor-wise” she spoke of Daniel Marshall, a History professor who taught a First Nations course. It was his **willingness to be personal** that Nansi valued the most. When her grandmother died she needed some accommodations because of missing classes and Nansi appreciated that, not only was he understanding, he “related to me” and told Nansi he was “proud” of her “being in school during this hard a time”. He also shared that he had been through it himself and encouraged her to “hang in there”. Nansi valued that he **made the effort to get to know his students, acknowledged and believed in them**. Nansi says this will help her “down the road” because she wants to be a teacher and now knows how significant “**going that extra mile to get to know someone and respect and acknowledge them**” can be in term of influencing someone’s learning experience.

A friend who has also been significant for Nansi is someone who **acknowledges** Nansi, **appreciates the small things she does for others**. Nansi says she knows that she does these things because “that’s who I am, I like to”, but that having a friend who acknowledges those gestures means a lot. Another important friend who Nansi met last year is also Indo-Canadian. Nansi sees her as a **role model**, “I have her on such a high pedestal”. Some of the characteristics Nansi values in her include her **intelligence**, her **comfort in her cultural self**, her **social grace**, and her **beauty**. Nansi says having a friend to go to temple with has also been nice because so many of her other friends are Caucasian. Nansi acknowledges that finding her own sense of self is still something she’s working on, “**I’m still not too sure...I’m not at peace with myself. I am but I’m not...I still have room to make it more solid**”. Nansi agreed that finding this seemed to relate to her sense of **integrity**, but at the same time, Nansi says it’s very hard to explain, to define.

A class that had a powerful impact on Nansi's thinking was a History course on race and ethnicity in North America, taught by Stagnor Ross (?). Nansi says she dreaded the assignments because they were so analytical, "they made you think". There were four **papers** in that course that asked students to **read articles** and **form an argument**, but they were also **very personal**, "it was **what you believed in**" and required **support from the articles**. The questions that Nansi found most engaging were the ones around defining culture, ethnicity and race, or how Irish Canadian culture is similar and/or different to African Canadian culture.

Right now Nansi is completing a double major in French and History, with the intention of doing the PDP Program. Originally she thought she would do the 5 year B.Ed. program, but it was her friend from first year who encouraged her to do French, something that hadn't been available in her small town high school. Nansi says she has always known **she wants "to be a teacher. I knew from day one"**. She always wanted a job where she was around people, and when she started babysitting she realized how much she loved being with children, discovering how curious they were about life and how intrigued about learning. Nansi says she knew then she wanted **"to be the one that teaches them to read or write...that moment in your life (learning to read) is so important"**. **"I want to be kind of the facilitator"**.

## **Katie's Story**

Katie is **analytical** and **observant**. Her early experiences in her family of origin seem to have influenced her path in significant ways, not only in choosing her path, but also in how she pursues it.

Born in the lower mainland, B.C., Katie's family moved to another suburb of Vancouver when she was entering grade one. Katie has two brothers, one older and one younger. In those early years, Katie says her life was "pretty cool". Family experiences included involved grandparents, a beautiful home, lots of community involvement like dance, sports and so on. Katie says that things began to deteriorate, at least on the inside of her family, when financial problems forced them to sell their home and move to a different satellite community on the lower mainland. Katie began to experience difficulties at school, "it was pretty tough actually starting grade four in a new city" and described shyness and social anxiety as part of her challenges dealing with other kids at school.

Katie says that her family "tended to give off" an impression of being together and an ideal family. She makes a clear distinction between the outside and the inside, where "there was a lot of deteriorating family stuff". She saw this not as a deliberate effort, but rather that there was a social perception that all was well. The internal deterioration lasted for several years, with Katie's parents splitting up finally when she was about 15/16. When asked about values, Katie said that both parents were adamant that studying and getting good grades were very important. She describes her mother as very involved in their school. Katie's father finished high school, and although Katie's mother has only a grade seven education, Katie describes her as "self educated" and "very smart". Katie says that her mother taught her and her brothers about values such as **respect** and **honesty**, as well as **open communication**, although the "teaching" was often more in the form of sharing experiences from her own life, which she wanted them to avoid. Katie says that she feels like she has "formed [her] own values", particularly around relationships, sometimes through trying to avoid "where they went". Katie says that, looking back, she thinks one of their biggest problems was **lack of communication**.

Katie sees the **lack of community** she experienced meant that some of that social learning that happens by participating with other families and people who were raised differently, she didn't get. What Katie can say though, is that she learned by "trying different things", "putting herself in different situations" and "seeing if it's right for me". Katie appears to have a strong **intuitive** sense of when something is right for her or not. When she knows she's "on the right track", Katie says she feels more comfortable with herself. This seems to be an intuitive recognition of "an ideal figure" she has in her mind.

Katie agreed that **autonomy** and **independence** are also strong values she has developed. When her father moved her and her brothers into the home of his new partner shortly after the family dissolved, Katie says this **independence** informed her decision to leave the country and travel after high school. This appears to extend to **financial independence**, which has influenced how she's managed her university/work life since leaving home. Katie said she got involved with the SWAProgram and spent the better part of a year in New Zealand and Australia, where she went on her own (met up with other Canadians through internet contact before leaving Canada) and worked in a variety of jobs to pay her living and travel costs. When she came back and moved to Victoria, she says that she learned how to make a budget, and went out immediately to look for work. Katie found a job her first day of looking. Katie still has that job working on campus. Katie says she took out student loans but didn't want to use them, saved and invested them, using a system of accounts to help her save money for things like tuition. Katie was very clear that she didn't want to graduate with debt. She says that maybe it's because her parents were always "borrowing money or having financial difficulty" that she knew that "you could be in the hole financially pretty quickly". Katie actually worked two jobs while going to school full time during second and third year at UVic. While she did well academically, she acknowledges that it had an impact on her participation. Katie feels **frustrated** that, in a way, she is competing with people whose parents are paying for their entire education, with the result that "you're not really on the same starting line". When asked if that had been different, would she have engaged

differently, Katie said, “maybe...I think that I would have loved to have more time to be more actively involved in the school community”.

Another clear value that’s influenced Katie’s experience seems to be a need for **challenge**, “**motivation** has always been very important”. Katie acknowledges that she has often experienced **apprehension, anxiety**, particularly when “looking at the big picture”. Katie credits her mother with helping her learn to break things down and take a little bit at a time, allowing her to get the end result but not get overwhelmed.

When asked to describe anything that might have helped her learn, change or grow more during her time at UVic, Katie says that she doesn’t think there’s “really any way of knowing”, but avers she’s definitely learned what hard work is, and to schedule her time. Katie sees a connection between the stress of university, working so hard to graduate without debt, and the body’s ability to keep itself healthy. Katie is not sure, however, that her thinking has actually changed, or would be different if she hadn’t attended university. She has learned to write differently, says that she can put together ideas in a more research-oriented way. She says that most of the shifts in her thinking she attributes to personal experiences, outside the classroom, learning from comparing herself to other people. Katie states that she has a very practical, career-oriented focus in her education, and wishes that she could have taken more focused, specialized courses earlier. While she sees the value for students who have had limited life experience and don’t know what they want to do, Katie feels that she has had a clear academic/career focus since elementary school, a goal influenced by her mother.

When asked to describe her most powerful learning experiences at UVic, Katie said there weren’t many, but she described “favourite” professors as being those who “live for what they’re teaching”. Dr. Bram Goldwater was one of these; Katie studied behavioural psychology with him. What she appreciated in his teaching was his stories about his dog, his home environment, stories that related teaching concepts to real life experiences. Katie says this helped her resonate with the concepts, rather than “memorize” and “spit it out”.

Another significant learning experience Katie attributed to the classroom environment. In a fourth year psychology seminar, Katie said she was very intimidated going in, but found that although the professor (*name?*) was very clear about the demands of the course, Katie was very interested in the content (child and adolescent personality and social development) and decided to risk it. She ended up “rocking that class”, which required discussion, sharing of personal experiences relating to concepts. Katie acknowledged that learning how to participate in that way earlier in her university education might have made a difference in her experience. Another prof whose teaching style resonated for Katie was Dr. Jodi Bains, from whom she took Health Psychology and Aging and Adult Development. Katie mentioned “feeling a personal connection” to the prof and colleagues through shared stories, “applying concepts to a life experience”, and said that “discussion helps a lot”... “It (the seminar) really tests your knowledge”. She contrasted this with “so many classes [where] you don’t know anything about them” [the profs].

An example of Katie’s ability to intuitively know what she needs, and her academic learning occurred in the African hand drumming course Katie took in her last semester. While the curriculum focused on African culture, Katie said she did some research on her own. She found that drumming helped her when she was feeling stressed, and was interested in the use of drumming in elementary schools.

Katie is currently researching grad school possibilities. Most of her research has been Internet based so far. She believes that she needs grad school to work in the ways that she wants (with children, in a psychology area, perhaps child clinical psych). Katie says her ultimate goal is a PhD, but acknowledges she might not get there. However, “if it’s anything like my 400 level Psych course, I want to do it”.

## David's Story

David is a person who thinks about the bigger picture. David wonders about what is going on under, behind, and around what's in front of him, which is pretty funny, because he also says "I don't like what I can't see". David has learned he needs to make the bigger picture visible. David has nearly completed his fourth year of a combined Biology/Environmental Studies degree.

Born and raised in Victoria in a family of Chinese descent, David is a first generation Canadian, although he says he feels more like second generation in that his parents came to Canada from China in their early teens and went to high school in Victoria. David says his parents are a prime example of a 'culture clash' in their thinking and their values. He sees their traditional Chinese ways of thinking influenced by a more liberal way of enacting the values embedded in that thinking. David sees himself as truly a Victorian.

David says his family (grandparents and their parents) did not come from a wealthy background; they were farmers in China, and his grandparents worked in blue collar jobs after immigration. David's father has an associate degree in Engineering Technology, and his mother went to work in a bank right out of high school. David will be the first person in his family to have a university degree. David lives at home with his parents and his younger sister, who is in grade ten. David says there is so much difference between them, with the six year difference, that many people assume he's an only child.

David agrees that one value that has been handed down in his family is **hard work**, "you should always work as hard as you can". David says in his family that means not just working hard to get something, but because it's "showing people around you that you're capable of working hard". David acknowledges that working hard in school "has become part of my identity as a person". This has become more important to David throughout his undergrad because it makes him "feel good" when he does it as well. This is related to **reputation**, "what others perceive you as being", and also **contribution to**

**community.** David is a very social person, who strongly values his **friends** and **relationships.** David says it's not just how you "relate to people", but also how they "relate back to you" which motivates him. David has learned that it's very important for him to pay attention to "what's rewarding and stimulating somehow".

David says another value that was handed down in his family is **respect,** particularly for family elders, as well as a desire to **earn the respect of others.** He's discovered that this happens for him quite naturally when he feels "like this is something that I was really genuinely interested in". When he's worked hard in things he doesn't care so much about, or enjoy, his hard work is "because I wanted to get through it". In hindsight, David can see that he did okay, but "I never ended up with anything above a B in courses like that" (Chemistry, Biology).

David says that at the beginning of his experience at UVic, he thought it was going to be a bit like "extended high school". He speaks of not having any idea of what he wanted to go into. Here his parents' values kicked in, at least on the level of implicit expectation: *You will go to UVic, not Camosun, you will get a science degree (BSc) or a degree that can get you a good job. Engineering, Medicine, or Law are acceptable. An Arts degree is not acceptable.* David says that these expectations had been engrained in him early in his upbringing, "I thought I was going to be a scientist for whatever reason". David feels fortunate that his parents are supporting him financially, but acknowledges that he knew on some level "what I took in university was pending how they were going to fund me for it". David says his grade 12 marks were "borderline" and he was uncertain that he would be admitted to UVic, perhaps secretly hoping he would go to Camosun for a year or two, or maybe even travel and find himself (?)

David tells a story of his first day at UVic, while everyone was gathering outside Elliott lecture hall he took a picture. David says he still has that picture and "every time I see it I get that feeling back". That feeling David describes as alienation, "There's no one here that I know". This was perhaps emphasized because David was always a bit younger than his classmates and friends, being "born a bit later". He laughs as he speaks of the

first face he recognized and how he “pretty much” clung to him even though they didn’t talk much in high school. This sense of alienation was brought home to David when he wrote his first test and “there was a small field for your name” but realized “mostly you were reduced down to a 7-digit number”. Throughout his first year, David says he knew he “really wasn’t into it”, he was “pretty much in abstract land thinking I’m not really in university right now”. He did “well enough” that first year, but says he didn’t speak to or get to know any of his professors. He says classes were “still way too big back then”, there was no room for interaction with professors at all”. In part David says he “never really had a reason to talk to them”, “never had to dispute a mark”, “never really had any questions”.

David recognizes now how disengaged he was, “I just took everything exactly as it was” and says his mentality for a while was “like I could care less”. His primary academic engagement in those first two years was with his TA’s, some of whom he credits as “awesome”, “they were the people that I really connected with, not the profs”. As a social being, the labs were “the only time I was able to interact with my class mates”, and David says he’d go, “hey, thank god you’re here, I know someone now”. David thought his whole undergrad was going to be like that, “a point of purgatory”, but had a very hard time in second year, when he took so many courses he didn’t enjoy, in particular, Biochemistry. That was like hitting a wall for David: “Wow, are you kidding me? If this is what biochemistry is, I never want to see it again. In my life”. David sees now that he was enjoying the ecological aspects of Biology more than any of the molecular, or neurological aspects, “you’ve taken the core stuff...you’re able to diverge into your own direction”.

David began to notice his groups of friends were changing and he “started to realize as well like people in ecology tend to think differently than people in the molecular side of things”. Here David can see in hindsight how his own values began to diverge from his parents, although he acknowledges that theirs are evolving too (for example around working hard versus seeking a bit more balance in life). This was the point where the status/prestige David sees attached to the molecular (medicine related) end of biology

was no longer enough to keep him working toward a goal he couldn't "see". David is very proud of his ability to complete his Chemistry and Biology requirements, "I consider that an **accomplishment** on my part". David seems to have learned discipline and takes satisfaction in being "a survivor". While he doesn't credit Environmental Studies with being the "saviour" of his degree, he had definitely gotten to the point of thinking, "is every bio course going to be like this"?

David connects his learning most strongly with his friendships, the good ones and the ones he has learned to let go of. As an example, David says he was introduced to Environmental Studies by a friend he no longer talks to. He found her ambition and self-serving decisions led her to criticize many of his decisions. David says he has learned to value most those friends who "have been there" when he's needed them. David speaks of learning a lot about how his friends thought, and credits the **people he has met and worked with** as being the most valued. "I realized along the way that university is about **getting through things together with other people**...it's all about the moral support". That doesn't mean it's been an easy process. David says he remembers feeling some **apprehension** and **confusion** as he began to grow apart from his old friends. David speaks of the concept of "*panarchy*" as part of his recognition that he needed to release the "inherited inflexibilities and rigidities" in his system of beliefs and values before he could "advance to the next stage" of his being. David is now fully committed and excited about the degree he will have, and its contribution to his ability to "do something that I'm going to enjoy".

David says he really began to understand the importance of this around the beginning of his third year. He sees it connected to the recognition that he did have more "choice" than he had earlier thought, to losing some of his naivety about things. Although he still considers himself "like a kid", third year was definitely a turning point for David. David values his "far, far broader perspective of the world", not just in terms of "what's happening in Iraq" but also "how I interact with people, how I perceive myself as a person". Appearance is one example of this for David, who says he used to dress up pretty well, "because you never know who you're going to meet on campus", but says

now he feels that it's not so important (and he is too busy to care so much!), "you don't have to make your statement by the way you look, you can make your statement by who you are as a person". David sees himself as a "far more **capable** person" than when he first got to UVic. Some of it, he acknowledges, he didn't get through all that well, but he did get through it.

This has been part of learning that he's not the smartest person out there, but he has come to realize that he's pretty capable. He's also aware that he's had to learn about **how to manage that ability to work hard**.

David says he learned a lot from an experience this last semester, where he experienced a "stress breakdown", working to the point of his body hitting "its own kind of sense of revolt". David sees it as an accumulation of not sleeping or eating properly and shutting himself off from the world, "I completely trashed my own social life temporarily". He says he's learned that "humans don't function that way apparently" and that he doesn't want to work like that, sees school/work as just one part of his life. He says he's also coming to accept "that failures can happen, and that failures are inevitably what may be required in order for you to grow". He refers to his ecological knowledge to describe the adaptive response to challenges in the environment of university as part of his learning.

David says that most of his "life learning" occurred outside the classroom, for the most part. He says what he'll remember most (rather than the academic content) is things like getting through some challenging courses and group projects **with people**, getting through it "because of diligence, because of determination". He gives an example of a group project in which three member of his group didn't speak fluent English. He said the academic content was insignificant compared to "gaining the experience of being able to deal with diverse groups of people right there". David says he's learned that flexibility is critical in learning how to work with different people, being willing to let go of "your own agenda". He acknowledges that he likes to have a certain amount of control but says he sees "your ability to adapt" as crucial to learning from the exercise of working in diverse groups.

## Rosa's Story

Rosa is a **deeply reflective** young woman. She says she **learns best by doing, engaging, connecting** – and it's taken her a while to learn that lesson at UVic.

Born in Victoria, the only child of immigrant parents from northern India, Rosa says that her father came to Canada in his early twenties to do a PhD in Math. He studied at several universities in Canada, completing two more Master's degrees before returning to India to marry Rosa's mother, who is nine or ten years younger than her dad. After her first trip to India in grade two, Rosa began to participate in Punjabi dancing, something she continues to enjoy today. Dancing was a cultural influence for her, being with peers she could relate to, moving to the music; it's where Rosa first learned how much she loves to be an **active learner**. Rosa says that the **encouragement** and **praise** she received in those early days she still remembers, which makes her think that is an important part of how she learns and has confidence to keep going.

When asked about her experience of culture, Rosa said that there was a time when she was in grade six when she made a **conscious choice to be more Canadian**. Because of her mother's experience of childhood trauma which had been suppressed for many years, Rosa became one of the first people to learn about her mother's experience. Because of her own and her mother's experience, Rosa says she began to recognize that the two cultures she lived in dealt with that knowledge differently, with more stigma and more silence in her experience of East Indian culture. That choice related to her sense of frustration with the silence she felt she was asked to carry. This has influenced Rosa's awareness of a need for **safety** and **community**, and also her value for **independence**. It has also contributed, she believes, to her habit of **avoidance** and **procrastination** around challenges and risks.

When asked about family values, Rosa said that her father and mother represent very different values for her, although she believes they were both great role models in their own ways. She cites an **unconditional support**, "no matter what happens" from them

both. She says they have worked hard to create a **safe space** in their home, but Rosa knows that seeking help to deal with “stuff” is also acceptable. Rosa says her father in particular represents “an **abundance of unconditional love** and kindness and support and encouragement”, exceptional in a collectivist culture. Rosa says that he is “a real person”, can “be vulnerable” but has so many different dimensions. She values his ability to express himself “in really...safe ways”. His **unconditional willingness to help** goes beyond their immediate family. His strong value for **family connectedness** is also characteristics of him for Rosa. As the oldest son, Rosa’s father is also a father figure to his siblings’ children. Rosa values his **nurturing, caring** and **loving** nature.

From her mother, Rosa has learned the value of **strength** and **hard work**. Rosa says she appreciates how hard her mother has worked at **being a good parent**, given her childhood experiences. Rosa is aware of the struggles her mother has had to “unlearn what she has been raised in” and her mother’s need to be **strong**, which meant “**not being vulnerable**”. This has not always been easy for Rosa, but she says it’s better now that she’s older and they can discuss it differently. It’s led to Rosa valuing the **courage to be open to new experiences**. Another value Rosa has learned from her mother is an **appreciation for diversity**. Her mother’s **openness to meeting different people** and **making the best of what you have** brought Rosa her godmother, a woman her mother initially met as a volunteer. Rosa’s godmother has multiple disabilities but she has also taught R about **strength** and the **ability to enjoy life despite multiple hardships**.

Rosa says her parents value education, and her father in particular encourages her to think about doing a Master’s degree, but she says she doesn’t feel pressured, particularly when she compares her experiences to that of some friends. Rosa says she has known for some time she wants to do a graduate degree, “that’s just the norm for me”. Rosa says she thinks her father’s experience of graduate school in a foreign country far away from family has contributed to her family’s flexibility around grad school/career expectations, “things sometimes can happen and that’s okay”.

While Rosa is very clear about her parents' hopes for her, she appears equally clear about her **right to choose her own path**. So far, she says she likes “the way they do a lot of things”. Recently she had a conversation with her father about marriage and dating and says that, at core, “the ultimate thing is...being happy, and having a “**healthy relationship**”, but she was, she says, surprised by some differences in their thinking. Nonetheless, she experienced it as “an open conversation, an honest conversation”. This seems to reflect a family value for **open mindedness**.

Rosa says that in high school she was never an academically strong student, but was deeply involved in student **leadership** activities, and a very active member of her high school **community**. Rosa went to Camosun College for two years, and although she wasn't academically inspired, she says she worked hard there. She got such good marks she was accepted at UVic, UBC and U of A. At this point, Rosa says she made a decision that she regretted for a couple years. Rosa chose to transfer to UVic because she could start in the summer, something she was keen to do. As soon as September rolled around however, Rosa said she realized that she “wasn't really loving it”, she would “rather be somewhere else”. Looking back, Rosa sees that she didn't perceive a **challenge** in coming to UVic. She knows herself as someone who likes “to **accomplish things**”. Rosa found that she wasn't committed or excited to be at UVic. Her marks suffered and she failed some courses. Rosa said she spent a lot of time thinking about her relationship, friends, sitting around, and killing time on the computer. Rosa seems to recognize that she dealt with that unhappiness “by not handling it, avoiding it”. She acknowledges, “I'm pretty good at **avoiding**”. Rosa's degree is in Psychology with a diploma in Intercultural Education and Training through Continuing Studies. Part of what Rosa loves about that intercultural emphasis is the practicum she's doing at the Victoria Immigration and Refugee Centre. It's helped her recognize that she loves **working with children**, and has helped her learn about children's different behavioural needs.

Rosa says she knew she wanted to major in Psychology from quite an early age (around grade 11 she made a career-related decision to “do my PhD in Psychology”). Although she has taken longer than she wanted to finish this degree, and recognizes she may not do

that PhD, Rosa shows a **strong ability to appreciate** that she has finally, in her last year of school, found the **engagement** and **commitment** she's been missing since high school. Rosa attributes most of this to (finally) signing up for the Peer Helping Program. Rosa acknowledges that she had been thinking about signing up for Peer Helping for about two years before she finally did. She says she recognized that she "was sitting on the edge thinking" and was getting increasingly hard on herself. When she finally acted, she said it's been "reward after reward after reward". From this she says she has learned she needs not to **avoid** or **procrastinate** anymore.

Rosa credits Dr. Joe Parsons as a counsellor who was very encouraging and supportive, and her mother who was (perhaps brutally) honest in her assessment of Rosa's avoidance behaviour. Another significant figure for Rosa was Dr. Honore France who taught one of her Continuing Studies courses. In particular Rosa appreciated his ability to create "safe space" as a professor. His teaching style was more **interactive**, with lots of variety and fun. Finally, a peer in her diversity class exemplified a kind of **openness** and **authenticity** that Rosa would like to cultivate in herself.

When asked what might have helped her get engaged at UVic sooner, Rosa said there were two things: being involved in something, "whatever it would be"; and if she had sought help sooner. She acknowledged, however, that she wasn't really open to that possibility in the beginning of her time at UVic.

What Rosa also understands now is that, for her, being at UVic, and experiencing stuckness, was, perhaps, necessary for her to get where she is now: **more confident**, **happy**, **excited** and feeling like her future is full of those opportunities to **engage**, to **participate**, and to **contribute to other peoples' lives**.

## **Kenzie's Story**

Kenzie was born into an idyllic setting. Born in a small town in Alberta, Kenzie lived in a rural setting with her parents and a younger brother, for the first seventeen years of her life. Living on an acreage, surrounded by forest and farms, with a small elementary school “right across the street from my house”, Kenzie grew up a **happy, confident and independent child**. She loved going to school, and **thrived on the supportive attention and encouragement** she received from her parents and teachers.

When it came time to change schools for grade seven, Kenzie says she experienced her first “terrible” year in a middle school that was “cliquey and snobby”. Kenzie says she was “a geek...the teachers’ pet and awkward” and she was made fun of, “tormented” by her peers who were into drinking and drugs. After grade seven, Kenzie says she really didn’t want to go back for grade eight, so with Mom and Dad running their home-based business, Kenzie was home schooled. To this experience she attributes her great **self-management skills**, where she learned “to plan out my time and do all my assignments on my own”. Kenzie says she got so good at it that she was able to do five days of work in four, allowing her to go back to the elementary school to volunteer. This allowed her to get to know those teachers better than ever and develop those positive relationships further.

By grade nine, Kenzie was ready to head to the big, artsy high school in the nearby town. Here she said there were still some of those angst-ridden peers who “thought I was annoying because I was really, really **happy** all the time” and who disliked her positive relationships with her teachers, but by grades 10 – 12, Kenzie had found her stride and belonged to a variety of groups, activities and programs, choosing to identify herself with the arty, drama “geeks”. **Staying busy** is a recurrent theme for Kenzie, who completed a partial IB program (History, English and Art) and participated in numerous clubs, often with a social justice theme, or some form of **creative expression**. Kenzie describes her involvement “in everything” in high school as a peak experience, where she was able to

explore her **multiple passions** and **experience success** while **performing** in a variety of **creative** areas like drama, writing, art, dance, and music.

When Kenzie graduated high school, her “whole family” decided to move to the coast. UVic seemed like a good place to head for university, and Kenzie decided to start out in the writing program. That summer, however, marked the beginning of what Kenzie calls the “dark years”, the year she turned 18. The continuity of her childhood was gone and Kenzie describes herself as feeling “homeless”, “my old life was my identity so when I moved my identity was gone”. Looking back, Kenzie can see how she “latched on to the first people” she met and “made them into my friends”. While Kenzie brought with her a “kick ass resume” and some amazing references from Alberta, she wasn’t thriving inside. Struggling with her priorities, Kenzie made choices she now sees contributed to her unhappiness. This includes being in a relationship with someone with very different values and friends who partied a lot. While she still did pretty well at school, she felt lonely, without focus and says she was focused on her “own sadness”. This sadness interfered with Kenzie’s ability to write for credit and decreased her enjoyment in school.

The lowest point of that year, for Kenzie, occurred during the summer between first and second year, when she had returned to her summer arts camp job with a local recreation centre, but was fired after receiving a warning. While for Kenzie the warning was the signal that caused her to open up to her parents, something she hadn’t done for many months, it was too late to save her job. As she reflects on it, Kenzie has reframed her experience and identified the **learning** as well as the **strength** it has helped her develop. Going to work at a labouring job picking flowers for the rest of that summer contributed to Kenzie’s reflection on her choices, her sense of herself, and her (lack of?) purpose. It is indicative of Kenzie’s positive nature that she was able to see that she did want some things in her life (*like challenge and creativity?*) and that she did not have to let go of her parents’ values (*e.g., for hard work, achievement and integrity?*) to become “herself”. When Kenzie went back to school that September, she says she went back because “I wanted to learn and I want better things for myself and I don’t want to just do whatever. I want to do the best I can”. Through her experience of personal crisis, Kenzie says she

realized that she wanted to switch her major (to Visual Arts), and that she wanted out of her relationship. When asked what values she recognized in this decision, Kenzie spoke of **family**. She also spoke of personality differences, but focused on those he apparently didn't value: her boundless **energy** and **fun loving**, sometimes silly **happiness**.

Kenzie also recognized that her parents' high expectations were less about "pushing me to go to university" and more about doing her best at what makes her truly happy.

Beginning second year in Visual Arts, Kenzie began to **thrive academically**. She says she also began to add in, "**filling my life** with stuff" like **volunteering** for a variety of projects. Her confidence rose, another relationship added support, but even ending that Kenzie says has taught her about making choices "for her". Although it tested her, Kenzie says it actually helped "me go further in establishing who I was". She began to write poetry again, and ventured to poetry readings at the Solstice Café.

A highlight academically for Kenzie involved joining the Co-op Program. Kenzie says the experience has helped her to regain her confidence in her ability to "have an awesome job" and has helped her to realize that there are, in fact, lots of jobs in the arts. There have been many benefits outside of that too, for Kenzie, not the least of which she sees as recognizing that she can be an adult, be a success, and still have lots of fun. Kenzie wonders if having such an idyllic childhood made it "extra hard" to grow up, and acknowledges that she had had a terror of becoming an adult, seeing it as an end to the joyful qualities of childhood. She acknowledges that she and her parents are still involved in a process of discovering "what level of nagging" about adult responsibilities is appropriate. Kenzie spoke of her very successful placement in Banff at an art gallery with personal satisfaction and the recognition that she did it on her own.

When asked about influences on her learning at UVic, Kenzie mentioned Dr. Bob Dalton in the Art Education program. From him, Kenzie says she recognized his **passion for teaching**. When she found out he was an artist too, and a writer for art magazines, and a curriculum designer, she began to see that he is living a life that reflects all the dimensions she wants for herself. "The passions fuel each other and create something

that's great than the whole". Kenzie asked if she could do an interview with him and asked him all sorts of questions about himself and his path.

Other sources of learning Kenzie cited were Lou Ann Martineau in the Visual Arts program and Lucy Pullen, her sculpture instructor. Kenzie says she didn't really like Lou Ann initially, in fact she was very intimidated by her, but from her has learned some very important things about **challenging herself to improve**. Kenzie says she has learned not to attach herself to what she creates, to see it as separate from herself. This allows her not to take criticism of her work personally, as being about her. She's also learned that her art "will never be perfect, and that there will never not be room for improvement". From Lucy, Kenzie says she has begun to understand the "essence of my art". Having a teaching/learning relationship for three consecutive classes allowed her work to develop, and allowed a mutual interrogation of that process. Kenzie says Lucy gave her "the vocabulary and...the ability" to figure out that "essence" by herself.

One way Kenzie realized that she had grown in her thinking about her art was through a conversation with a peer about his reaction to a critique. "I had to see someone else react the way I originally reacted to see how different my reaction was then...see how much I had changed."

This **passion for growth**, for **learning** and for **challenge** is just one area of strength for Kenzie, who is beginning to discover that she doesn't have to give up her **joy in life**, or all her **varied passions**, to be an adult in the world. Kenzie also spoke of her learning about balance, and how her passion could feed some "all or nothing" thinking. She described an epiphany that still informs her self-care, honouring both her "yin" and yang," and seeking balance in her work and play.