

## Direct Study of Parenting: A Serendipitous Outcome in a Course on Adult Development

Robert B. Williams  
Crandall University <sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.**—One activity of a course on adult development was preparation of case records on adults who consented to be studied.<sup>2</sup> Parents were always among adults being studied. The activity involved recruiting adult candidates with whom participants had regular contact for permission to write brief accounts of their activities. Participants assured the adults who consented that they would not write anything about them that they would not want written about themselves. The case records were based upon ordinary daily observations, conversations and other information written in bound composition notebooks in the form of dated anecdotes. Participants were expected to write three to four anecdotes each week and confidentially share them with their team. In the team, participants worked together analysing, coding and interpreting the anecdotes. One of the expected outcomes of these activities was learning about the adults' current life goals or tasks. These are referred to by Havighurst (1972, 1980) as developmental tasks. Among these are general tasks of parenting in early adulthood (18-35 yrs.) labelled as rearing children and in middle age (35-60 yrs.) as assisting teenage children to become responsible and happy adults. What was documented in the case records would likely have been labelled by Havighurst as the developmental "task-lets" of parenting. Some examples of these "task-lets" were the provision of and/or oversight of affection, nutrition, hygiene, grooming, rest, monitoring behaviour, care in illness, socializing with extended family, church and school attendance, and family recreational activities. Participants also gained awareness of the impact of parenting on adult development.

### Instructor's Description

This course seeks to sensitize students to the theories and reality of adulthood and aging by introducing them to selected literature on adult development and to the preparation of a case record that included mastering activities that permitted an analysis of the adult's world.<sup>3</sup>

### Course Objectives

Participants will (1) develop their abilities to observe, objectively and accurately record, and interpret adult behaviour across various ages and a variety of contexts; (2) withhold judgments about behaviour when evidence is lacking; (3) substantiate statements about behaviour with evidence; (4) seek the meaningfulness and/or function of behaviour; (5) gain knowledge and appreciation of what adults are up against at different ages and stages of the lifespan; (6) understand the developmental tasks of adults at various ages; and (7) become aware of the different views of human behaviour.

### The Activities

#### **Participants recruit adult candidates for study**

Participants ask several adults with whom they have regular contact for permission to write brief accounts of their activities. Participants assure the adult candidates who consent to be studied that they will not write anything about them that they would not want written about themselves. The consent is limited to dates within the semester of the adult development course. The adult candidates are also advised that they may

not be the adult selected for study. Participants maintain the case study subjects' privacy by not identifying them in any way. Fictitious names are used in writing the case study record. They note ordinary activities that they observe or that they are told about. Each participant obtains a signed consent form from each adult candidate for study (see Appendix A). Profiles of the two adults who gave permission are shared with the participant's study team (see Appendix B). The participant's team decides which of the adults will be studied. After the team members identify the adults for each participant to study, the information and permission slips for those not selected and the permission slips for those selected for study are submitted to the instructor and secured. Hereafter, the participant's team will assist in the analysis of the case study record. Access to the case study records is limited to the participant, the 4 or 5 members of the participant's study team, and the instructor of the course. When the course ends, the case study records will be given to the instructor for grading. After some time, they will be destroyed.

#### **Benefits/risks of the activities**

Those adults being observed will assist the course participants studying adult development by allowing them to borrow behaviour to learn and master activities that permit analysis of and understanding of an adult's world. Each of the adult study participants and teams are oriented to and requested to commit to a code of ethics to insure the protection and confidentiality of the adults being studied. The code provides that all information in the written case study records is kept confidential which means inaccessible to non-team members. All information presented and the discussions during team meetings must be safeguarded by all members of the team. Teams review the code of ethics at the beginning of each class meeting. If these guidelines are followed, no foreseeable risks are involved in the case study activities process.

#### **Writing behavioral anecdotes**

Information for the case study activities is based upon ordinary daily observations and conversations. The observations, conversation and other information are written out by participants in a bound composition notebook in the form of dated anecdotes. Participants are expected to write three to four behavioral anecdotes each week. They confidentially share their anecdotes with their team and work together analyzing, coding and interpreting them. Only anecdotal information that is written in the case record is communicated (read) to the team. This insures that the information given to team members about the adults being studied is documented and available for use during all the case study activities.

<sup>1</sup> robert.williams@crandallu.ca

<sup>2</sup> In 2005, the case record on the adult was in lieu of a virtual adult computer program similar to "Sniffy" the virtual rat computer program for the study of behavior (Alloway, Wilson, & Graham, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> The activities for analyzing the adult's world are based upon activities developed and applied to the study of children and adolescents (e.g., Gay & Williams, 1993; Prescott, 1957, 1962; Williams & Gay, 1998).

Case study record building occupies the time of the team members for about the first six to seven sessions. During these sessions, the team members provide feedback to one another about their anecdotes based upon the criteria/characteristics of a 'good' anecdote. The guidelines for the characteristics of a good anecdote taken from Prescott (1957) are: (1) Inclusion of the date, place, and situation. This is the setting. (2) Describes the actions of the adult, reactions of others involved, and the responses of the adult. (3) It quotes what is said to the adult and by the adult during the action / interaction. (4) Includes 'mood cues'—postures, gestures, voice qualities, and facial expressions that give cues to feelings. (5) Goal is a little vignette of a behavioral moment in the life of the adult.

Along with feedback about whether the anecdotes meet the criteria, the team members also learn to *discriminate objective* from *subjective* information. Parentheses are placed around anecdotal information that is determined to be *subjective* as in the example from the case of Ann Peters (a pseudonym), a 33-year-old, given below.

#### January 13 Profile

Ann and I are neighbors in the same apartment complex. Her apartment is quite spacious with two bedrooms, a living room, a modern kitchen and a dining area. The living room is a corner room with windows across the front and one side like a sun room. This room is furnished with a couch and two matching chairs. (My impression of the room was that it was very clean, comfortable and very much lived in.) Many whatnots, books, bric-a-brac, and family pictures adorn the room. The two bedrooms are quite large and very (comfortably furnished.)

Ann is the mother of two boys. Brian who is 10 years old and Mark who is 8. She is divorced which imposes a regular obligation on her every other week. She must make certain that the boys are ready to spend a week with their father.

Ann works as a hairstylist. (I see her as well-groomed and stylish.) (She is well-spoken and an engaging conversationalist.) My relationship with Ann is as a neighbor and a provider of child care. Every other week I provide after-school care for her boys on Mondays thru Thursdays. On Mondays and Wednesdays Ann works until 7:00PM and on Tuesdays and Thursdays until 5:00PM. I also, provide care on the Saturdays on weekends when the boys are at their mother's. Ann has Fridays and Sundays off.

Categorizing *objective* from *subjective* information continues throughout the case study process. The intention is that participants will be able to attain objective 1 of improving their ability to objectively and accurately record and interpret the behavior of adults at various ages across a variety of ordinary contexts. It is also intended that participants will attain a greater sensitivity to the difference between *objective* and *subjective* information and how they both contribute to understanding the individual. It is also worth noting that Information shared in anecdotes may raise questions from team members. Participants write the questions and responses to them as anecdotes and the written responses are read to the team. Team members become familiar with all of the individuals being studied.

#### **Recurring patterns: One means of learning about current life goals or tasks**

There is no time in our lives that we are not being influenced by a personal agenda of life goals or tasks. Havighurst (1972, 1980) refers to each individual's personal agenda as *developmental tasks*. These are tasks that every individual in a society must master if s/he is to be seen as a successful participant and contributor to society or culture. *Developmental tasks* are further defined as arising at a certain time in the life of the individual. The timing for mastery is partly determined by maturation and partly by social and cultural expectations. The final element in the definition of *developmental tasks* is that when an individual masters them at the time deemed appropriate by society, s/he is rewarded by significant others and members of the larger society as being successful. On the other hand, if an individual is not able to master one or more of the developmental tasks at the time prescribed by society, s/he might be regarded as inadequate and less capable.

One way to become aware of the *developmental tasks* that an individual is working on is to process the case study record applying a Recurring Patterns procedure. The procedure involves reading the record carefully and listing any behavior or situation that occurs two times with the dates of each event. Thereafter, add the dates for each subsequent occurrence of the events. Participants continue listing recurring behaviors throughout the process of writing and sharing the anecdotes with the support of team members.

Examples of recurring behaviors of Ann Peters:

Ann always prepares a weekly after school schedule for the boys that includes chores. 1/19, 2/2, 2/16, 3/2, 3/16, 3/30, 4/1, 4/13, 4/27, 5/11

On days when she works late and on Saturdays, Ann always has what I regard as wholesome home prepared meals for the boys that only need to be heated. 1/19, 1/21, 1/31, 2/2, 2/4, 2/14, 2/16, 2/18, 2/28, 3/2, 3/4, 3/14, 3/16, 3/18, 3/28, 3/30, 4/1, 4/11, 4/13, 4/15, 4/25, 4/27, 4/29, 5/9, 5/11, 5/13

Ann comments that she misses the boys during the week they are with their father. 1/26, 3/9, 4/5, 4/19

Comments about the difficulty waking the boys for school after they return from the week with their father. 2/2, 2/16, 3/3, 3/30

Ann reminds me to check on how Mark brushes his teeth as the dentist indicated that he may not be brushing enough. 3/28, 4/27, 5/11

Brian comments about it being good that his mother checks his homework and finds the mistakes before he hands it in. 2/4, 3/5, 3/31, 4/15, 5/12

Ann expressed being very tired at the end of the work week. 1/31, 2/14, 3/14, 3/28, 4/11

I hear compliments about Ann as being a very caring and responsible parent from other residents in the apartments. 2/10, 3/2, 4/11, 4/30, 5/12

Insight and understanding of the multiple, complex, and interrelated causes of and influences on recurring behaviors can be gained by applying the multiple hypotheses process. It involves looking over the list of recurring behaviors and selecting any clear pattern of behavior that is of interest or

challenge to the participant for analysis via a multiple hypotheses process. The multiple hypothesis process is a guided experience that makes it possible for participants to gain some understanding of the motivations leading to a recurring pattern of behavior in which one is interested. This process is based on the assumptions that:

1. Human beings are goal directed and behavior is an attempt by individuals to move toward desired goals.
2. Behavior makes sense when viewed through the eyes of the individual doing the behavior.
3. A behavior may have multiple causes. These causes are often complex and inter-related.

Using this set of assumptions, one selects a recurring behavior and states it in the form of a question. Why would Ann or any parent insist on always preparing meals for the children rather than allowing the person providing care to prepare them? Participants of the study team brainstormed answers to this question. Some examples of their educated guesses are listed below.

### **Multiple hypotheses**

Why would Ann or any parent insist on always preparing meals for the children rather than allowing the person providing care to prepare them? Could it be that Ann (+ = fact supporting hypothesis, - = fact refuting hypothesis):

She is concerned about eating healthy. +1/21, +1/31, +2/2, +2/4, +2/14, +2/16, +2/18, +2/28, +3/2, +3/4, +3/14, +3/16, +3/18, +3/28, +3/30, +4/1, +4/11, +4/13, +4/15, +4/25, +4/27, +4/29, +5/9, +5/11, +5/13

She wants to be seen as a responsible parent. +1/19, +2/2, +2/4, +2/10, +2/16, +3/2, +3/5, +3/16, +3/28, +3/30, +3/31, +4/1, +4/13, +4/15, +4/27, +4/30, +5/11, +5/12

She is concerned about the health of the boys. +3/28, +4/27, +5/11

She is concerned that the boys not have access to junk food. (**No data supporting or refuting this hypothesis at the time of this activity**)

This process usually gives participants confidence about a number of the hypotheses tested and a summary sentence can state this. This task should be completed and shared with the team. The following is an example of a summary statement:

It appears that Ann is concerned about healthy eating (1). She wants to be seen as a responsible parent (2). Ann is concerned about the health of the boys (3). There was no support for being concerned about the boys having access to junk food (4).

### **Coding the anecdotes: Another means of learning about current life goals or tasks**

As the case study record becomes more substantial participants are introduced to a further interpretive activity involving a coding process. Information or facts in the anecdotes are assigned to one or more of the following six areas (adapted from Prescott, 1957, 1962; see also Penry, Gay, & Evans, 1991):

1. **Physical**—maturity level; energy output; health; handicaps; skill in body use; physical attractiveness.
2. **Affective**—Is there any information in the anecdotes that tell us about situations and events involving “important others” and their behavior which may tend to increase or decrease feelings of security on the part of the individual? (Intra-family relationships? Close friends? Pets? Other important individuals?)
3. **Social**—cultural background; rural vs. urban; region; social class; family expectations; values; methods to achieve internalization of expectations and values.
4. **Cohort/Peer group**—group acceptance/rejection; activities; roles; status; behavioral codes; group standards.
5. **Self-development**—conception of and feelings about self as influenced by physical, affective, social and peer-group; processes used to work out meanings such as symbolizing, abstracting, generalizing, reasoning, imagining, inventing or creating; intermediate and long-term purposes as revealed through behavior.
6. **Self-adjustive**—quality of the person's feelings about physical adequacy, affective relationships, social significance, status among peers and adequacy as a person; reactions to events that evoke pleasant or unpleasant emotions and how they are coped with when experienced repeatedly or with great intensity.

When a particular fact, behavior or interaction provides information about one of the six areas of the framework, the team member inserts the number for the area in the left-column beside the sentence. In some instances, a particular fact or behavior was relevant to several areas. In such instances, the participant/team member writes the numbers for each of these areas. Coding is begun during team meetings and continued by team members on their own. Participants often seek advice from the team about their coding decisions. The following is an example of an anecdote with coded facts and information from the case of Ann:

- Initially, I met Ann when I was on my way to Centennial Park to jog. She called after me. She was dressed to jog and indicated that she was going to Centennial for a run. I learned that she runs
- 1.01 at least three time a week and feels that she needs to run to stay fit. She appears to be both fit and attractive. She indicated that
  - 5.01 she felt that the physical activity helped her endure her long days
  - 6.01 days at the shop where she is standing for hours.
- During another occasion when we met on one of our jogs, Ann
- 2.01 said that she was looking for someone to provide child care every other week for her boys. She indicated that whoever takes this on must be dependable because she needs care every other week. Two days would involve after school until 7:00PM and two after school until 5:00PM. Also, needs Saturdays from 7:30AM to 5:00PM. Some Saturdays the boys will spend with their grandparents.

This coding procedure gives organization to the facts and

information in the anecdotes. For example, the number 5.01 means that the fact or information is coded as area 5. Self-development and that it was the 1<sup>st</sup> time data was coded for this area. Participants begin tabulating/listing the coded facts, behaviors or interactions according to the six areas. The tabulation/listing and numbering of the coded facts, behaviors, or interactions reveals what area or areas are most prominent in this particular adult's world.

#### **Mid-study questions to assist in better understanding case-study individuals**

Participants who have been in the Adult Development class since the first will find that they have written 12 to 15 and possibly up to 20 anecdotes. By this time, team members who have been offering guidance and assistance with the coding process are likely quite familiar with all of the adults being studied. Team participants have been asking questions to clarify the information that has been shared with them in the anecdotes. Today, each team is asked to review each adult being studied and propose a question or questions that will help the members better understand the adults being studied. The question(s) should be entered in the case study dated for today. Do not limit the questions to those that you are assured that you can answer. It is expected that questions will be posed that one may not be able to answer. Even questions that cannot be answered because of limitations of our study activities are important to document. Questions that can be answered via our activities should be.

#### **Case Study Summary**

A final activity is the preparation of a thoughtful essay summary of the case study record using information from the profile, anecdotes, mid-study question(s), multiple hypotheses, and the tabulated data of the six areas by responding to the following questions:

1. What developmental tasks was this person working on at the time of this study?
2. What personal and/or environmental adjustment problems does this person face?
3. What assets or strengths does this person possess as a person or in her/his environment?
4. What aspects of this person's experiences have made noteworthy contributions to this person's attempts to learn to resolve various developmental tasks?
5. What might others do, not do, or do differently to facilitate this person's optimum development?

When the essay is completed, it is shared with the members of the study team. Participants note any feedback they receive and request each team member's signature at the bottom of the essay indicating that it has been shared with them. Participants are reminded that the other members of the team are depending upon them for support as the case studies are being completed.

#### **Instructor's observations**

Regarding effectiveness, from the perspective of students' / participants' course evaluations were generally positive—receiving an overall average of 1.5 on the instructor evaluations with 1 being positive on a continuum to 5 as negative. It is noteworthy that many of the students / participants who were commuters had access to candidates of the most extensive age ranges for study. A case study review form is shared in Appendix C.

#### **References and Selected Resources.**

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## Appendix C

## Case Study Guide and Review Form

	NAME:	
1	Code of Ethics	
2	Profile of the individual studied	
3	Comments on group's feedback & recommendations for selecting an individual to study	
4	Anecdote rate is 3 to 4 per week (30 to 40 anecdotes)	
5	Anecdotes have subjective statements identified with parenthesis	
6	Anecdotes become more objective throughout the term of the record	
7	Area 1 Physical Processes— Coded anecdotes <input type="checkbox"/> Tabulated list <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:	
8	Area 2 Affectional Processes— Coded anecdotes <input type="checkbox"/> Tabulated list <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:	
9	Area 3 Socialization Processes— Coded anecdotes <input type="checkbox"/> Tabulated list <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:	
10	Area 4 Peer Group Processes— Coded anecdotes <input type="checkbox"/> Tabulated list <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:	
11	Area 5 Self-Developmental Processes— Coded anecdotes <input type="checkbox"/> Tabulated list <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:	
12	Area 6 Self-Adjustive Processes— Coded anecdotes <input type="checkbox"/> Tabulated list <input type="checkbox"/> Comments:	
13	Mid-study Questions to Better Understanding Case-Study Subject (Date: _____ )	
14	List of Recurring Behaviour Patterns	
15	Analysis of Recurring Patterns via Multiple Hypotheses Step	
16	Proposal of at least 10 hypotheses	
17	Hypotheses evaluated for support / refutation by facts in the record	
18	Summary statement on Multiple Hypotheses Step	
19	What developmental tasks was the person working on at the time of this study?	
20	What personal and/or environmental adjustment problems does this individual faces?	
21	What assets or strengths does this individual possess as a person or in his / her environment?	
22	What aspects of this person's experiences have made noteworthy contributions to this person's attempts to learn to resolve various developmental tasks?	
23	What might others do, not do, or do differently to facilitate this person's optimum development?	

Comments: