

“I refuse to give up!”

A qualitative investigation of the conditions and experience undergone by students on academic probation who participated in academic companionship in a university context

by

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When I embarked on this journey, I thought I knew what to expect. I eventually learned that I did not... Luckily, many individuals have been there to guide me through the novelty of this extensive project. With their support I was able to navigate this new experience that was as exciting as it was intimidating.

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« Ce que les étudiants et étudiantes vivent en classe oriente
la façon dont ils perçoivent leur expérience universitaire,
et même leur perception d’eux-mêmes. »

“What students live in the classroom guides
their perception of their university experience,
and even of themselves.”

(Detellier, 2012, October, Trans.)

Abstract

This study examined the conditions and experience of students who were placed on academic probation in view of key elements of Dewey's (1958, 1938/1997, 1934/2005) theory of experience. Core data emerged from 16 in-depth interviews with five students who received assistance from an academic support program while on probation. An additional interview was conducted with the academic companion and another with the program developer. A document analysis and a researcher journal supplemented the data. The interviews were analyzed according to a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1958, 1938/1997) to produce profiles and thematic connections (Seidman, 2006). Findings are presented in five texts. The first and second manuscripts depict the stories of two students using the profile genre. These texts disclose rich stories where the meaning of experience is lived. A third manuscript examines students' experience from the student and professional perspectives. Major themes uncovered, include (a) resistance to seek help; (b) deep personal costs; and (c) a desire to succeed and complete their undergraduate studies. A fourth manuscript explores companioning as experienced by students and supported by resource personnel. It reveals that (a) the companioning role was defined by a specific form of guidance and attendance to self-confidence and (b) the program helped students clarify their needs, promoted their adaptation to the university context, and offered support through a positive relationship. A fifth manuscript examined the characteristics of a fruitful helping relationship. Findings suggest that (a) a rapport characterized by presence and trust and (b) an approach promoting responsibility, awareness, and holism were key. These findings offer a weighty contribution to the literature on post-secondary education by revealing rich and unique experiences. By tapping in the complexity of the participants'

experience, findings help shift away from the current focus on obstacles and deficiencies often attributed to probationary students.

Résumé

Cette étude a examiné l'expérience d'étudiants ayant été placés en probation académique à la lumière d'éléments-clés de la théorie de l'expérience de Dewey (1958, 1938/1997, 1934/2005). La principale source de données provenait de 16 entrevues en profondeur auprès de cinq étudiants ayant participé à un programme d'accompagnement universitaire alors qu'ils étaient en probation académique. Une entrevue a aussi été menée avec l'accompagnatrice et une autre avec la conceptrice du programme. Une analyse documentaire et un journal de bord de la chercheuse complètent les données. Les entrevues ont été analysées selon une analyse narrative tridimensionnelle (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1958, 1938/1997) de façon à produire des profils et des liens thématiques (Seidman, 2006). Les résultats sont présentés dans cinq textes. Les premier et deuxième textes dépeignent l'histoire de deux étudiants sous forme de profils. Ces textes découvrent de riches et profondes histoires véhiculant la probation comme expérience de vie et la signification attribuée à celle-ci. Le troisième texte présente l'examen collectif de l'expérience des cinq étudiants ayant participé au programme d'accompagnement. Cette analyse est enrichie des perspectives de l'accompagnatrice et de la conceptrice du programme. Trois thèmes se dégagent de l'expérience de ces étudiants en probation académique soit (a) une résistance à faire usage des services de soutien; (b) des coûts personnels considérables; et (c) un désir de réussir et de compléter leur programme d'études. Un quatrième texte explore l'expérience d'accompagnement tel que perçu par les étudiants et les professionnels. L'analyse révèle que (a) l'accompagnatrice agissait à titre de guide et était attentive à la dimension de la confiance en soi et (b) le programme a aidé les étudiants à identifier leurs besoins, a soutenu leur

adaptation au contexte universitaire, et a offert un soutien personnalisé par l'entremise d'une relation d'aide positive. Le cinquième texte se concentre sur les particularités d'une relation d'aide efficace en contexte de probation académique. Les résultats relèvent que cette expérience est qualifiée par (a) un rapport de présence empathique et empreinte de confiance réciproque et (b) une approche globale favorisant la responsabilité et la conscientisation. En dévoilant la richesse et l'unicité de l'expérience, ces résultats offrent une contribution intéressante. Illustrant la complexité des expériences de probation ils contribuent à s'éloigner d'une vision centrée sur les obstacles et les déficits des étudiants en probation académique.

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List of acronyms

ACP – Academic companioning program

A program developed at the University of Ottawa to assist student in academic probation

GPA – Grade point average

The cumulated grade point average considered as a criterion for good standing, academic probation, and dismissal

U of O – University of Ottawa

Post-secondary institution in Ottawa, Canada, where this study took place. U of O is a large urban university that offers programs in French and English languages

Preamble

This study is about experience. It focuses on an insider's point of view of university experience and more specifically academic probation and companioning, which I will define in subsequent pages. I believe my own experience as a student, although I did not experience probation, was particularly relevant in this endeavour as it has inspired and guided this quest to understand more about what it means to be on academic jeopardy and what it means to be companioned. Therefore, in the next few pages, I briefly present my university experience to help the reader grasp my own point of view as researcher and first hand interpreter of the accounts the study participants shared with me. The tone of the next few pages is relatively casual as I wrote them freely to share my story...

I had been proud of being admitted to the undergraduate program of my choice. I was confident I could succeed, however, undertaking university studies was a big deal to me, a first generation student. I remember beginning this journey feeling uncertain and apprehensive. A few weeks into the first semester of my first year of studies, I could hardly believe the extent of the gap between my high school experience and this new and unfamiliar experience in a setting I did not fully grasp. Reflecting on my first steps in university, I am not certain I realized my poor appreciation of this new context. I was far too busy, wrapped up in a plethora of books, articles I did not have time to read, class notes I never managed to revise, a six-floor library and annex, and copy cards I kept forgetting in the machine! Off campus, I was struggling to uphold two and sometimes three part-time jobs, an apartment that was less than desirable (so were my roommates – sorry guys), a social life that quickly became inhibited, a diet that should have been balanced, and what can I say about my sleeping habit...!?! Midway through the midterms, first semester of the first year, I started wondering how I was going to do this, all four years of this... But, I did get through my

undergraduate program. I think my perseverance was tied to the satisfaction I experienced as a result of the relatively good grades I managed to obtain.

I went on to pursue Master's studies, which came with its share of challenges but turned out well. I continued on this flight and momentum and undertook Doctorate studies. Rather early in my venture I found myself in a dark place. Adversity had the best of me it seemed. I felt overwhelmed, inadequate, emotionally drained. I felt like I had pushed as far as I could and reached my limits. My best just did not seem to be enough. When a friend suggested I interrupt my studies, I considered the possibility with dread and anguish. I think what made this contemplation gruelling is the fact that my identity was wrapped up in my being a student, a successful student, a doctorate student. I did not know how to quit that. "What, I am to just put on my shoes and walk to the academic secretariat to withdraw from the program?" I did not know how to quit. And I did not. I think my perseverance was tied to mulish stubbornness, pride, and perhaps passing madness...

Life happens during the course of a Ph.D. I was no exception to this. In a nutshell, I broke up a long-term relationship, sold my house, and moved as often and a Traveler. A few months later I lost my thesis advisor, which ensued major changes in my research project and my support centre. A year and a half into the program and it felt like the two main pillars of my life were crumbling down and I was struggling to remain whole. Soon after, I was shaken when my father was injured in an explosion in South Asia, I later companioned him through prostate cancer, and I underwent surgery myself, which involved a risk of facial paralysis that terrified me. These were momentous events in my life. Other situations now make me smile when looking back... In the second half of the process, I lost two computers (for overuse I assume), I broke an arm and a foot in one soccer game (although that takes real talent, it will certainly slow down the writing of a thesis!), I got a full time position I enjoyed

but eventually made the difficult decision to prioritize studies and let go of this position. To add insult to injury, my roommate left me (she was the best roomie ever) and she took Gustave the cat with her! Indeed, life happens during the course of a Ph.D.

Mid way into the Ph.D. (well, at the time I thought I had about a year to go before finishing) I had a painting made to represent my journey. I explained to the artist¹ that my doctoral experience was as challenging as it was gratifying. It was intense and although dark at times, the venture was well lit by a renewed conviction that I was to complete this beast of a project and grow as a person. “And you want THAT represented in a painting?!” Said a friend and fellow doctorate student, with evident puzzlement. Yes.

¹ Mattie Kennedy created this painting for me. At the time he was completing a Masters’ degree and it is possible his own experience informed his work.



The painting represents a person mountain hiking, an activity I particularly enjoy. The surrounding rocks represent the many thoughts and emotions we can experience through an endeavour, in this case, my doctorate studies. Some carry you through as indicated by the character's right hand and foot. Others, I think, you have to "step on" as she is, with her left hand, to keep going. The woman depicted appears tired, but her posture reveals her determination and indicates that she will go on. I love this painting. It was in my office in the apartment I loved for three years and in my bedroom when I moved to my mom's place because I could not afford my beloved apartment in Sandy Hill anymore!

On the topic of adversity, I cannot help thinking about a lesson one of my participants taught me. He related an anecdote, which showcased the power of social interactions and resonated with me. Talking about his grandfather he recounted :

His wife died. (...) He went into a severe, severe depression then (...) he stayed in his room for about a year. He just lost it completely (...) And he mentioned to me, he said “If you’re really upset, something’s really bothering you, the most important thing that you can do is go out and hang out with people. Go to the legion, go to the bar, hang out with people, talk to them.” (...) only one thing can help you get out of it, you know.

My own story would not be complete without honouring social interactions and the presence of key individuals through my journey. Family, friends, professors, and colleagues have been equally important for different reasons in the last seven years. They have genuinely offered unconditional love and support, acceptance, guidance, and feedback. They have also shared opinions, impressions on their own academic process, laughter, and yes, nachos and beer. The emotional, social, and academic dimensions of support, the solid and stable relationships, and the positive interactions have been invaluable throughout my doctoral studies. Indeed, with regards to support, I have to say, I have been privileged.

As I sat in a committee member’s office, shaky and vulnerable, explaining where I was at in the progression of my studies, she said: “You know, challenging experiences can certainly help hear others’ difficulties.” Thank you for that seemingly simple comment that had struck a cord for me. I do feel, in fact, that my story has, first and foremost, ignited my interest to investigate the depth of the experience of academic probation and companioning. I had an inherent appeal and wonderment for what allows people to perform and experience desired feelings in the face of adversity. However, my personal academic endeavour aroused

a sensitivity regarding the personal experience associated to difficulties in higher education and a desire to focus my energies to address an important problem. I also believe that my experience, given the challenges and support that qualifies it, provides me with a particular lens to consider the stories shared in this study. It is with my own understanding of what it means to struggle and to be well surrounded through academic endeavours that I heard and interpreted the stories of the students who participated in this investigation. I look forward to share this with you.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation is interested in the theme of academic probation, and more specifically, in the conditions and experience undergone by students who have been placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship. To situate the research issue and the orientation of the investigation, I² begin this introductory chapter by describing the research context, including historical considerations, values of access and equity, and benefits of higher education. Then, in light of this, I clarify the research problem and specify the research purpose. An outline of the thesis format will close this section.

Research Context

To appreciate the context of the investigation, it is important to take account of historical transformation of the university education, global and local considerations in the knowledge-based economy, as well as the value of higher education for individuals and for the larger community.

Historical considerations

University education has undergone notable transformations in the last decades. A key change regards the heterogeneity of the student population. While the university was traditionally a site of reproduction of the elite of society, it has, since the 1960s opened its doors to populations previously underrepresented in higher education (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Raab & Adam, 2005; Romainville, 2000). This precipitated a remarkable growth in

² The first-person pronoun is used in this document to refer to the researcher and author. I claim my voice in this text in order to bring a human side to it and convey the sense of closeness that exists between my data and I, as researcher (Tierney, 1997). Although the question of authorial voice is still under debate, I have endeavoured to make it clear who says what (Blauner, 1987). This was also a way to acknowledge that this dissertation is my construction, not a neutral and objective presentation of facts and participants' voices (Sparkes, 2002; Van Maanen, 1988; Wasserfall, 1993).

demand for post-secondary education and diversification of the student body in terms of culture, demographics, socioeconomic status, and needs (Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, 1990-2009; Chenard, 2005; Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; Romainville, 2000).

Another important transformation concerns the premises of higher education. Public financing and mass education have transformed the nature of post-secondary education. A traditionally elitist nature was substituted by values of equity and access (Lomas, 2002; Merisotis & Phipps, 2000; Raab & Adams, 2005). By the same token, universities have become accountable to financing institutions and governments and they must demonstrate that investments are profitable in that they promote graduation (Romainville, 2000).

Indeed, the traditional rationale that students, not the institution, fail is now being challenged. Authors increasingly suggest that student success should be a shared goal and responsibility of both the student and the institution (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Tinto, 2006-2007; Forger, Carter, & Chase, 2004). Undeniably, students must prioritize their studies, respond to distractions, accept the involved personal sacrifice, and commit to their academic endeavours (Tinto, 1987; Tyson, 2011-2012). This being said, Tinto (1987) argues that when admitting students, universities must concurrently accept the responsibility to provide each and every one of them with adequate opportunities and resources to successfully complete their program of study. In other words, the student and the institution both have to take ownership of their role in promoting student success (Conzemius & O'Neil, 2001; Gupton, Castelo-Rodriguez, Martinez, & Quintanar, 2009).

Values of access and equity: Globally and Locally

These transformations of university education are important to consider in the current knowledge-based economy, wherein it is generally recognized that progress and

development rely heavily on education and training. To cultivate progress, a plethora of programs are implemented globally to promote access, equity, and expert training of professionals (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010). Developed countries, Canada among them, have witnessed an important professionalization of their workforce and, nowadays, obtaining adequate and specialized training is necessary to perform the tasks required by many career paths (Baum & Payea, 2005; Romainville & Noël, 1998). Learning and training rates are increasing in Canada, however, the first annual report examining nationwide post-secondary education uncovers that the sector lacks flexibility to meet learners' needs and the demands associated with technological changes in the current knowledge-driven economy (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006).

In Ontario, the Ministry of Education promotes the provision of high quality education for all in order to foster social cohesion and citizen well-being. It emphasizes equity as an essential principle of its publicly funded education system in order to ensure that all students have the opportunity to achieve their full potential (Ontario. Ministry of Education, 2009). The provision of an innovative and responsive education and training system is prioritized to efficiently face the modern economy through flexible learning models and spaces, modernization of financial assistance programs, as well as the continual improvement of teaching excellence (Ontario. Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2011). The site of the current study, the University of Ottawa (U of O), is also connected to the larger-scale rationale of access and progress. As a foundation of the Destination 2020 strategic planning is a principle that fostering an ethic of service, a culture of engagement, and a sense of civic responsibility is in order to ensure that graduates play an

efficient role in Canada's intellectual, economic, and cultural life (University of Ottawa, n.d., a).

Benefits of higher education

In view of these values of equity and access in the contemporary university, it is interesting to consider the noteworthy benefits of higher education for society and individuals. It is generally recognized that national progress is associated to education and training. Developed countries have witnessed an important professionalization of their workforce and, nowadays, obtaining adequate specialized training is necessary to perform the tasks required by many occupations (Baum & Payea, 2005; Romainville & Noël, 1998). Higher education of citizens generates societal benefits such as lower levels of unemployment and poverty, less dependence on social support programs, and increased civic participation (Baum & Payea, 2005; Romainville, 2000).

For the individual, benefits of higher education include higher earnings and better work opportunities and quality of life outcomes such as personal satisfaction and enhanced life experiences (Astin, 1993; Baum & Payea, 2005; Raab & Adam, 2005; Tinto, 1987). Equally important, it is suggested that through university life, students develop their personal identity, their autonomy, and a more positive self-concept, they expand their social network, and they acquire psychological maturity and well-being (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Given the undeniable benefits of higher education, there is a global, national, provincial and institutional consensus concerning the importance of fostering student success. However, access to university does not guarantee success or graduation (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). In fact, graduation rates in Canadian post-secondary institutions vary from 48 % to 89 % (Grayson, 2003; Keller, 2008). Locally, data suggest that at U of O, 26 % of

the 2001 cohort did not complete their studies (University of Ottawa, 2008). Accordingly, much discussion and strategic planning has occurred to raise the graduation rate.

Research Problem

While this disconnect is unsettling, it raised further interrogations for me. Evidently, I am in the process of completing doctoral studies. When I introduce myself, one of the first identity claims I share is that I am a student. It is often one of the few affirmations I disclose about myself. It seems that my identity is wrapped up in this endeavour and activity. When I look around me, talking with a close cousin who studies in an undergraduate program, or listening to young adults at the cafeteria or on the bus, it is evident that their status and occupation as a student is central to them. In view of the importance attributed to the endeavour and status of a student, I wondered about those at risk of not completing their studies. Specifically, I wondered what conditions and experience they face in relation to the threat of mandatory withdrawal. I was curious to know more about what these conditions and experience mean to them.

Purpose and Research Questions

Numerous students are placed on academic probation each year with the impending possibility of being constrained to withdraw from their program of study. Despite their intention to pursue and complete their program, they are at risk for attrition. The value of higher education for both the individual and society validates universities' current efforts to better assist students in academic jeopardy, those who may be mandatorily withdrawn.

In parallel, student experience is particularly relevant in my institutional context. In fact, U of O is committed to provide students with a quality university experience. The first of four strategic goals of Destination 2020 is to offer a rich and inspiring student experience by enhancing the learning environment and the responsiveness of its services. Numerous

clear actions are itemized to achieve this goal (University of Ottawa, n.d., a). Endorsing the views and values of U of O, I sought to learn more about the experience of students facing the possibility of mandatory withdrawal.

I therefore undertook to investigate the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship. I did so with a focus on an emic perspective, that is, an intent to understand the phenomenon from the point of view of those involved in it (Merriam, 2009). In accordance to the theoretical and methodological frameworks of the thesis, the conditions and experience encountered by probationary students are taken to include the participants' journey through the school and university system, their placement on academic probation, as well as their course through an academic companionship program (ACP). As such, my interests and concerns motivated the following twofold research query: What are the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship? And what do these conditions and experience mean to them?

Thesis Format

I have chosen to present my doctoral project in the manuscript format. Thus, after the traditional dissertation sections, the findings are presented in the form of manuscripts. Specifically, this dissertation contains an introduction, a review of relevant literature, a presentation of the theoretical framework, and a description of the methodology I employed. After these framing chapters, five manuscripts showcase different aspects of conditions and experience in relation to academic probation and companionship. A discussion and conclusion of the research will complete the thesis. This dissertation is written in English with the

exception of the second manuscript and two student profiles (appendices J and L) reporting the stories of francophone participants recounted in French.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

In this second chapter I present literature relevant to the theme of academic probation. I begin with key writings on academic attrition seeing as much of the research and texts on academic probation rely on it. Following this, I propose a delimitation of the notion of academic probation, which appears insufficiently defined in current literature. I then carry on with an analysis of the literature on the theme of academic probation. Specifically, I report on reasons leading to academic probation and probationary support programs. I also propose the term “academic companionship” based on the francophone literature and the terminology used by Wolfet (1999; 2004) and I discuss the concept, following with the presentation of a program that was implemented at U of O to assist students on academic probation. I conclude this chapter by considering gaps in the literature.

Academic Attrition

The phenomenon of undergraduate persistence and dropout has captivated much attention and stimulated much research in the last decades. To better situate my research project on academic probation, this section begins with a review of literature on academic attrition, particularly on the process leading to academic dropout. A plethora of research has proposed various models of student attrition framed in different theoretical perspectives. Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) model of student departure has been developed over several years and is stated as the most mature and most cited models (Braxton & Hirschy, 2005; Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). An overview of Tinto’s model of institutional departure, which seeks to describe and explain individual withdrawal from higher education is offered below.

Tinto’s model expanded Spady’s (1970, 1971) work on student departure inspired by Durkheim’s sociological theory of suicide. Tinto (1975) emphasized that a theoretically sound model of academic attrition must focus on the normative and structural integration of

the student in university. Specifically, persistence and withdrawal are believed to be the result of the student's experience and integration within the academic and social systems of university. According to this literature, academic integration is appraised in terms of grade performance and intellectual development. Grade performance is judged in relation to explicit standards to be met and is an extrinsic form of reward. In contrast, intellectual development is subjective and aligns with norms of university or faculty environment (Spady 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993).

Social integration is defined by attitudes, interests, and representations that are compatible with the influences and expectations of the institutional environment (Spady, 1970). Successful social integration is dependant on successful communication or interaction with peer groups, faculty and support personnel which may result in important social rewards such as friendship support, faculty support, and collective affiliation (Tinto, 1975).

Authors generally agree that features of the student as well as those of the institution should be considered in order to understand the phenomenon of academic withdrawal (Astin, 1970, 1993; Bean, 1980; Pascarella, 1980; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993). These features influence the nature of interaction between the student and his³ institutional environment, which, in turn, determines the extent to which a student will successfully integrate in university (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1987). Student attributes include family background, individual characteristics (e.g., ability, personality, and sex), past educational experiences, and goal commitment (Tinto, 1975, 1987). Institutional factors are believed to include peer students, faculty, and administration (Tinto, 1975, 1987), as well as faculty culture, organizational structure, administrative policies, institutional size, and academic

³ The masculine gender is used throughout this document to enhance the flow of the text.

standards (Spady, 1970). Both the personal and institutional features influence the student's experience in the classroom, peer culture, and extracurricular activities. In turn, these experiences shape educational outcomes such as performance, intellectual development, satisfaction and ultimately, the decision to persist or withdraw from university (Pascarella, 1980).

Tinto (1975, 1987, 2006-2007) proposed that commitment plays a central role in the decision to persist or withdraw from higher education. Post-secondary studies inevitably require committing oneself to invest time, energy, and resources to satisfy the academic and social demands of the university and it is asserted that the greater the commitment, the greater the likelihood of persistence (Tinto, 1987). In that regard, Bean (1980) even suggested that commitment is the most important variable explaining withdrawal. Similarly, Astin (1993, 1999) proposed that the main factor influencing student's persistence and withdrawal is involvement, that is, the physical and psychological energy they dedicate to their academic experience. Tinto proposed that commitment is affected by the individual's experiences in the academic and social systems of the university (i.e., the greater the integration in the university systems, the stronger the commitment; 1975, 1987, 1993). He also suggested that an institution of higher education is a human community and that its ability to retain students lies not in its program and structure but more accurately in its underlying values and orientation toward students (Tinto, 1987). This demonstrates the importance for academic institutions to foster the welfare of its members. Authors also assert that commitment is related to satisfaction; the greater the satisfaction the greater the commitment (Bean, 1980; Spady, 1970). Spady further explains that satisfaction is generated early in the process leading to persistence or withdrawal (1971). Satisfaction with the university experience is contingent on academic rewards (i.e., grades and intellectual

development) and social rewards (i.e., congruence with the influences and expectations of the academic environment, and support from fellow students and faculty; 1970).

Tinto's work has evolved since its original model. The initial descriptive model explaining student departure later focused on policy initiatives to foster student perseverance and graduation. This line of research witnessed a gradual movement away from a perspective seeking to understand why students failed toward a perspective seeking to understand what institutional practices can improve student retention (Tinto, 2006-2007). As stated earlier, it is increasingly believed that student success is the responsibility of both the individual student and the institution they frequent (Conzemius & O'Neil, 2001; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Gupton, et al., 2009). Students' willingness and ability to participate fully in their own education is undeniably essential, however, Folger, Carter, and Chase (2004) argue that the university should help them develop as students. Accordingly, most universities now have centres and programs to assist students in their academic endeavours. Many programs seek to support students whose performance is less than optimal in hopes to foster their academic success and graduation.

Academic Probation

The models reviewed above focused on academic departure and drop out. Student drop out has been defined as the "cessation of individual student membership in an institution of higher education" (Bean, 1980, p. 157). This explanation does not account for students on academic probation. Effectively, a distinction between students who voluntarily withdrew from their program of study and students who were dismissed was established in earlier literature (Vaughan, 1968) and is currently recognized (Grayson, 2003; Munt & Merydith, 2011-2012). It is suggested that students who voluntarily withdrew and those who were dismissed had different dispositions (Vaughan, 1968) and patterns of interaction within

the academic and social systems of university (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1987). In fact, Tinto highlighted that academic dismissal is generally related to poor grade performance whereas voluntary withdrawal is associated with a lack of congruence with the academic and social norms and climate of the institution (Tinto, 1975). These distinctions between voluntary and mandatory withdrawal warrant the need to discuss and conduct research about a specific population of students who are on the verge of dismissal, but who do not wish to withdraw from their program of studies, that is, probationary students. These distinctions also highlight that research on academic probation should rely on an understanding of specificities related to probationary status, conditions, and experience and not solely on the literature on academic attrition and retention.

Delimiting the notion of academic probation

It is difficult to trace the emergence of academic probation. Seemingly it was instituted in higher education decades ago without being formally defined in the scientific literature. Scarf (1957) was among the first to use the term in empirical research, although he did not characterize it. Twenty years later, Neely (1977) equated academic probation to academic problems, thus mudding the term. Another text is useful in clarifying the notion of academic probation. Although Smith and Winterbottom (1970) did not explicitly define the expression, their article suggested that (a) students were placed on academic probation when their grade performance was below a satisfactory threshold, (b) they could remain in their program of study but must increase their grades, and (c) they would be dismissed if they did not.

Institutions specify their own conditions and criteria of academic probation. Many universities propose levels of academic status. In some universities a student is first placed

on academic warning when his cumulative grade point average (CGPA⁴) falls below the requirements of his university. If he does not increase his CGPA enough to be in good academic standing in a given period of time, he is then placed on academic probation. Again, if he does not enhance his CGPA enough to be in good standing, he is then suspended from the university (Pagan & Edwards-Wilson, 2002-2003; Vander Schee, 2007). Similarly, other universities distinguish between students who are on minimal risk probation and maximum risk probation (Molina & Abelman, 2000) or plus probation and final term probation (Butler, 1999).

The academic warning status does not apply at U of O. In our institution, students must maintain a minimum CGPA of 3.5 on 10 in general bachelor's programs and 4.5 on 10 in the honours bachelor's program to be in good academic standing and pursue a degree. As per the university's regulations on mandatory withdrawal, a student whose CGPA falls below these required minimums may remain registered in his program of study, but will be on academic probation. The status of academic probation is lifted when the student's CGPA reaches the minimum required by his program or faculty. However, a student who has not met these requirements after two sessions or 24 course credits is required to withdraw from his program or faculty. Academic probation can thus be seen as a transition status. It is a transition from unsatisfactory performance to good academic standing or dismissal. When a student faces mandatory withdrawal at U of O he must wait a period of 12 months before submitting a new application to a program of study (University of Ottawa, n.d., b).

⁴ Although some authors use the expression "grade point average" (GPA), it is understood that it is in fact the student's cumulated grade point average that is considered as a criterion for good standing, academic probation, and dismissal. Therefore, in this text, the expression "cumulated grade point average" (CGPA) is used.

In addition to these grade requirements, withdrawal is mandatory at U of O when a student fails 18 course credits or fails a compulsory course twice. These regulations apply to most undergraduate programs but some may have slightly different conditions and criteria for academic probation, with special approval from the Senate (University of Ottawa, n.d., b).

Notification of academic probation may come as a surprise to the student and may be difficult to accept. To this effect, some universities' website include a page offering information to students on what remedial actions should be undertaken and what services are available to support the student's endeavour to recover good academic standing. Some websites indicate that academic probation serves as a warning to students whose grades fall below institutional requirements signalling that they must take corrective action to improve their grades within a given period of time to avoid dismissal (Brock University, n.d.; Thompson Rivers University, 2009; University of Toronto, n.d.). Notably, Kwantlen Polytechnic University's (2007) webpage on academic probation includes valuable information regarding how withdrawals and failing grades can affect student loans, recommendations regarding the number of courses to take while on academic probation, and the amount of time that should be dedicated to each course. These webpages on probation are tailored to students in academic jeopardy, therefore their tone is welcoming and information is formulated in terms accessible to students. Contrasting this, the information provided on U of O's website is technical and articulated in professional jargon. It seems evident that a student-friendly, easily accessible webpage on academic probation is an essential tool for probationary students. Such a webpage should be developed with the intent to help them understand the status of academic probation and encourage them to be proactive in seeking the plethora of success services offered on campus. The usefulness of web-based technology

has elsewhere been highlighted in providing greater access to academic support (Houart & Dozot, 2007; Santa Rita & Scranton, 2001).

A Model of Academic Probation

In the objective of providing a full overview of the literature on academic probation, it is interesting to consider K. N. Kelley's (1996) a three-stage model of academic probation. This model, informed by an attribution theory (H. H. Kelley, 1973; Weiner, 1979), proposes that a student explains his successes and failures with information on locus of causality, stability, and controllability. It describes three stages at which the student attempts to understand why he failed. In the first stage he examines the precursors of undesired outcome and makes attributions relative to causality, stability and controllability. The model announces that in a second temporal stage, the student experiences reactions that are affective, cognitive, and behavioural. While the model describes the cognitive process, less attention is given to the affective and behavioural aspects of the reaction and the reader must rely on other theories to understand the expression of the model (Weiner, 1985). Finally, a third stage represents longer-term consequences of academic probation. In time, affective reactions change and intensify and cognitive reactions affect the student's self-concept reducing his self-efficacy and self-esteem. The student's patterns of action are mediated by affective and cognitive responses to academic probation and they may, for instance, trigger withdrawal, reduce productivity, or moderate persistence (N. K. Kelly, 1996; Weiner, 1979, 1985).

The three-stage model is bi-dimensional in the sense that it considers sequential phases of academic probation as well as cognitive, affective, and behavioural factors related to it. These two dimensions have the potentiality to promote a comprehensive understanding of students' experience of academic probation. Given its dual dimension of temporal

sequence and holistic view of experience, I initially believed the model had great potential for considering what it means to be on academic probation. Conceptually, however, some of its features lack clarity and the reader must rely on other theories to understand the process. Also, although the model is grounded in an attribution theory, it emphasises precursors to academic failure and understates the influence of personal perceptions on consequences of the non-attainment of goals. Finally, it appears that the model has received little attention from the scientific community since its publication 15 years ago, and empirical studies are needed to validate or refine the three-stage model of academic probation. Although I initially contemplated the possibility to introduce it in the frame of reference, it was not retained as such due to the limits above-mentioned.

Analysing the literature on academic probation

Research devoted to the specific topic of academic probation is relatively young and sparse. It follows that available literature on academic probation is exploratory. Scientific articles and theses are mainly quantitative in nature and primarily concern reasons for being placed on academic probation as well as the assessment of support programs implemented to assist probationary students and promote their return to good academic standing. In the following pages I present a comprehensive overview of this literature. The reader will also find a table (Appendix A) describing the purpose and key methodological components guiding the reviewed investigations and informing the results that are presented here. This table allows the reader to discern the current orientation and trends of the body of research on academic probation.

Reasons leading to academic probation.

An analysis of the body of research on academic probation allows discerning characteristics of students on academic probation and reasons for being placed on academic

probation. Authors typically point out that students on probation are underprepared for post-secondary education or ill equipped to navigate institutions of higher education. One study reported that grades have the strongest capability to predict placement on probation (Jewell & Riddle, 2005). Studies indicate that many students do not possess crucial elements of success such as commitment, self-discipline, and knowledge of institutional or faculty culture and expectations (Humphrey, 2005-2006; Tovar & Simon, 2006). Other authors indicate that probationary students often lack essential tools such as study skills, time management, goal-setting, note taking, and anxiety management (Humphrey, 2005-2006; Hutson, 2006; Kamphoff, Hutson, Amundsen, & Atwood, 2006-2007; Mann, Hunt, & Alford, 2003-2004; Olson, 1990; Romainville & Noël, 1998). Austin and colleagues indicated that probationary students conveyed in self report questionnaires, that their struggles stemmed from poor class attendance, insufficient amount of study, poor time management and feeling like their professors did not care about teaching or about them (Austin, Cherney, Crowner, & Hill, 1997).

In seeking to further understand the process leading to academic probation, investigations often compare students on academic probation to students in good standing. One study indicated that students on academic probation had a significantly lower high school CGPA, worked more and worked full-time more often, and reported living with children more often. It also suggested that causes of academic difficulty most often included personal problems, time constraints, course difficulty, and lack of motivation (Trombley, 2000-2001). Results of another investigation indicated that procrastination, bad time management, lack of motivation to attend classes and complete assignments, poor study strategies, disorganization, and poor concentration were most often reported as obstacles to academic performance among students in jeopardy (Isaak, Graves, & Mayers, 2006-2007).

Another study conveyed that poor preparation, employment, personal illness, being a caregiver, and mental health issues (i.e., depression, stress, anxiety, and attention deficit disorders) were impediments leading to probation (Holland, 2005). In keeping with Holland's results, Heiligenstein and colleagues found that students suffering from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder had lower CGPA and were more likely to be placed on academic probation (Heiligenstein, Guenther, Levy, Savino, & Fulwiler, 1999). Qualitative data analyzes of one study suggested that difficulty to balance school, work, and home-related responsibilities, personal relationships, and lack of connectedness to campus life were notable obstacles to academic success (Hutson, 2006). Furthermore, Hsieh, Sullivan, and Guerra (2007) found that, in comparison to students on academic probation, students in good standing established goals to master the skills they were learning and had a stronger belief that they could successfully complete academic tasks. These authors also suggest that students labeled as less successful held sabotaging beliefs and goals. Some results are contradictory however. While an analysis indicated that students in academic probation reported significantly more motivational and stress related difficulties (Isaak et al. 2006-2007), another showed no significant differences with students in good standing with regards to self-rated motivation, interest, concentration, and determination (Trombley, 2000-2001). Jones (2000) also indicated that students on academic probation differed from those in good standing with regards to race (with African American and Hispanic students representing the largest percentages of probation students) and age (probationary students having a lower mean age – 25-26 years – than those in good standing – 28-29 years).

Studies highlight that students in academic probation express more factors hindering their academic endeavours and emotional issues than students in good standing (Holland, 2005; Isaak et al., 2006-2007). Furthermore, on a self-report survey, students on probation

and in good standing identified similar academic skills problems although students in jeopardy scored significantly lower on a standardized assessment of study skills. This suggests that students on academic probation might not recognize the extent of the shortfalls of their study skills (Isaak et al., 2006-2007).

Research on academic probation is vastly quantitative. Very few studies integrate qualitative methodologies. One qualitative inquiry by Balduf (2009) was interested in the phenomenon of underachievement. The investigator conducted online interviews with first-year students who obtained high grades in high school but struggled in the university setting and were placed on academic warning or probation. These interviews were geared to understand the students' perception regarding the causes of their underachievement. The analysis unveiled that students considered they were underprepared for university studies, they had difficulty managing their time, and they had issues with self-discipline and motivation. The data also highlight that participants believed an intervention geared at improving their attitudes and behaviours would best assist them in reaching their achievement potential. Another qualitative in-depth investigation by Thomas (2003) interviewed students on academic probation to understand the complexity of their experience. Its findings suggest that students on academic probation were underprepared for undergraduate studies. Specifically, this investigation indicates that probationary students did not prioritize academic responsibilities, their work restricted the time they could dedicate to their studies, they lacked the skills, knowledge, or attitude to function at an optimal level in higher education, socio-cultural dilemmas interfered with their studies, or they did not cope well with the transition from high school to university. Also, in accordance to the shared responsibility of student success, this study considered the inadequate provision for students' needs in the university setting. In particular, the participants' stories suggest that they did not

feel there was a good fit between them and their university and they did not feel they were part of the academic community, they considered they had poor learning experiences in the classroom, and they did not take advantage of the success services offered on campus because they were uncomfortable asking for help or doubted these services would meet their needs (Thomas, 2003).

The reviewed literature on academic probation is largely focused on deficits and impairments of probationary students. One quantitative study, however, has extended beyond characteristics to inquire on the impact of being placed on probation (Lindo, Sanders, & Orepoulos, 2010). The authors highlight that the aftermath of being placed on academic probation is different for distinct sub groups. For instance, students who obtained good grades in high school, men, and students whose native language is the dominant language are more likely to undergo larger discouragement effects after being placed on academic probation and to drop out. However, the results of this study indicate that the grades of all groups of returning students are enhanced after being placed on academic probation. The authors suggest that probation status represents a strong incentive to improve one's grades and meet the requirements.

Aside from uncommon examples such as Balduf's, Lindo and colleagues' and Thomas' studies, much of the literature on academic probation depict probationary students as being unfit for undergraduate education as they do not possess the required competencies, dispositions, or inclination. In light of this literature that often presents probationary student characteristics as generalizations, it has been highlighted that these students do not form a homogenous group (Douglas College, 2002; Humphrey, 2005-2006; Hunziker, 1991). In view of this, one can wonder if these studies depict a clear portrait of academic probation. Certainly, the literature review does not shed light on the conditions and experience

undergone by students placed on academic probation or and does not elucidate what this means to them.

Support programs.

In accordance with the abovementioned shared responsibility of student success (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Folger et al., 2004; Tinto 1987, 2006-2007) most institutions of higher education now offer programs to support students, including, those on academic probation. Support programs are designed and implemented with the hope to help students on probation raise their CGPA to have their probationary status lifted and provide them with tools to complete their undergraduate studies. There are no policies or guidelines mandating the development of probationary programs (Lindsay, 2000). Therefore, programs are developed instinctively based on support personnel's experience and a genuine desire to see students succeed (Lindsay; Newton, 1990). As a result, programs vary greatly in terms of structure, format, as well as theoretical foundation. Some mainly offer group workshop-based interventions (Austin et al., 1997; Coleman & Freedman, 1996; Hildreth, 2006; Humphrey, 2005-2006; Shao, Hufnagel, & Karp, 2009-2010) while others rely mainly on individualized academic advising (Mann, Hunt, & Alford, 2003-2004; Newton, 1990; Preuss & Switalski, 2008; Schwebel, Walburn, Jacobsen, Jerrolds, & Klyce, 2008). Other programs promote both types of interaction and encourage students to take part in group workshops in addition to individual interaction with an advisor (Kamphoff et al., 2006-2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006). Concurrently, some support programs emphasize learning skills for the specific context of higher education (e.g., note taking, examination anxiety reduction, time management; Mann et al., 2003-2004) while others offer personal support (Kamphoff et al., 2006-2007; Preuss & Switalski, 2008). Finally, length and time commitment vary from one

two-hour session (Hildreth, 2006) to semester long workshops and advising meetings (Mann et al., 2009-2010).

Despite the variety in program implementation and practices, authors typically report benefits from participating in probationary programs such as higher CGPA, higher probability of regaining good academic standing and persistence, and lower rates of dismissal when compared to students who have not participated in remedial programs. Most published reports presenting such programs indicate that these differences are significant or substantial (Coleman & Freedman, 1996; Hildreth, 2006; Humphrey, 2005-2006; Kamphoff et al., 2006-2007; Lipsky & Ender, 1990; Shao et al., 2009-2010; Schwebel et al., 2008).

Studies evaluate the effects of program participation on student performance. One investigation observed that the grades of students enrolled in a motivational and empowerment program for students on academic probation were significantly higher than the grades of students on freshman warning who did not participate (Kamphoff et al., 2006-2007). Another research indicates that the level of participation (i.e., low, medium, high) had a significant impact on change in CGPA whereby the students with the highest level of participation benefited the most from the intervention (Mann et al., 2003-2004). Students in another project who met an advisor regularly were more likely to improve their CGPA and less likely to withdraw from their program of study (Preuss & Switalski, 2008). Results of one investigation indicate that a sole two-hour workshop focused on emotional impact of probation, resources available to students, campus policies, and skills development had significant positive results on probationary students. Participants had a higher CGPA, were removed from academic probation in higher rates, were dismissed in a lower rate, and failed fewer classes than non participating probationary students (Hildreth, 2006). One study observed a 73 % short-term retention rate among probationary engineering students in a

guidance program. Unfortunately many of them were back on academic probation or withdrew from their program one term later, when they no longer received support (Lee, Marszalek, Medina, & Linnemeyer, 2008). This suggests a need for long-term support to ensure lasting changes in habits. Another study proposes that interventions should last over eight weeks to foster expected cognitive, emotional, and behavioural changes (Milligan, 2007). Other than benefits in terms of retention and CGPA, one study also highlights that students participating in a probation program reported greater satisfaction with their university experience as a result (Mann et al., 2003-2004).

Literature on probationary programs is informative in proposing inventive ways of assisting students. However, calling for improvements, Merisotis and Phipps (2000) noted a decade ago that research on the effectiveness of remedial programs was scarce, underfunded, and inconclusive. More recently, other authors have criticized the body of literature on the effectiveness of probationary programs suggesting that results of some studies appear “ambiguous” owing to dubious methodological choices (Munt & Merydith, 2011-2012, p. 462). Another group of researchers conducting a systematic review and meta-analysis of research on retention programs indicate that, in many studies, methodological designs lack rigour and reporting is poor. Calling for rigorous research to assess retention programs, they conclude that “even the best studies included in this review are methodologically suspect” (Valentine, Hirschy, Bremer, Novillo, 2011, p. 214).

Academic Companionship

To fully appreciate the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship, it is necessary to consider the literature relating to support and companionship. A component sometimes associated to support programs is referred to as academic advising in the American literature.

Emerging in the 1970's, academic advising has typically focused on three approaches; developmental, prescriptive, or intrusive (Allen & Smith, 2008; Crookston, 1994; Vander Schee, 2007). Prescriptive advising is an outcome-oriented course of action whereby the expert advisor pinpoints the needs of the student and proposes a plan of action (Molina & Abelman, 2000; Vander Schee, 2007). Developmental academic advising is collaborative, process-oriented, and aims to help the student develop holistically as an educated adult (Harrison, 2009; Vander Schee, 2007). Intrusive advising also referred to as high involvement advising emphasizes the advisor – advisee relationship, proposes support activities on a regular basis, and seeks to foster student motivation and responsibility (Molina & Abelman, 2000; Vander Schee, 2007; Schwebel et al., 2008).

A review of the literature exposes a problem of ambiguity vis-à-vis the meaning and expectations associated with the notion of advising, a problem highlighted almost 40 years ago in a classic article (Crookston, 1972; Harrison; 2009). While the concept of advising seems to imply that advice may be accepted or not, the responsibility, initiative, and control in the advisor – student relationship is often confusing as both parties may not have the same idea of each other's role. To this effect Crookston (1994) stresses the importance of clarifying and agreeing on the terms of the interpersonal and helping relationship to enhance the effectiveness of the process.

The francophone literature in Europe and Canada employs the expression *accompagnement scolaire* to designate a process offered to and lived by students in academic jeopardy (Dozot & Romainville, 2004; Glasman, 2001; Romainville, 2000; Romainville & Noël, 1998). My analysis of this literature convinces me that the term *companioning* appropriately translates the notion of *accompagnement*. Although the English term emerges from literature on death and bereavement, it refers to a type of relationship that is particularly

fitting. Wolfelt's work articulately presents companionship as a counselling approach that advocates walking alongside, listening with the heart, being present to another person, and respecting the person's disorder or confusion (Wolfelt, 1999, 2004). In keeping with this conceptualization, Wolfelt proposes the term *companion* to describe the person who has the role of walking alongside and being patiently present to the other, seeking to stir their inner force and find new connections in their world (Wolfelt, 2009). The following pages showcase this approach. Given that Wolfelt's notion of companionship aligns with the form of support offered to students in this investigation I use the expressions *academic companionship* and *academic companion* in the following pages. Importantly, with regards to the problem linked with the term and practice of academic advising (Crookston, 1994) I believe companionship reflects the nature of the relationship proposed.

The development of a support relationship is crucial in academic companionship (Cobut, et al., 2009; Glassman, 2001; Romainville & Noël, 1998) and the advising processes (Cruise, 2002; Heerman & Maleki, 1994; Ross-Thomas & Bryant, 1994; Ryan & Glenn, 2002-2003; Schwebel et al., 2008; Silverman & Juhasz, 1993). Although it requires a lot of human, physical, and financial resources (Houart & Dozot, 2007), Glasman (2001) argues for personal and individualized companionship. This format allows the creation of a personal connection between the student and a representative of the institution (Boutinet, 2007a), which arguably, might foster the sentiment of being integrated in the academic system of the university (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993).

Through a dialogic process, the academic companion seeks to understand the strategies and methods used by the student and the nature of his academic struggles (Cobut et al., 2009). The companion can thus propose to the student techniques and strategies that might be more productive (Cobut et al; Glasman, 2001). It is also recommended that

professional resource personnel should not be limited to specific academic activities. Quite the contrary, it is argued that the academic companion's role should include understanding the student's life, on and off campus and guiding him through difficulties regardless of their nature (Preuss & Switalski, 2008). Vander Schee (2007) also defends a comprehensive approach to academic support and indicates that it should focus on academic as well as non-academic factors (e.g., financial, family, social) that may prevent students from realizing their full potential.

The ultimate objective of probationary programs is to help the student recover good academic standing by helping him raise his CGPA and pass courses. The professional resource person and student collaboratively seek to understand academic factors hindering the student's performance and produce an adapted and personalized recovery plan. An essential purpose of academic support however, is to enhance the student's interest and openness for learning (Glasman, 2001). This is in line with the literature on academic attrition that highlights the importance of student involvement in academic experience as linked to persistence in higher education (Astin, 1975, 1999). The support relationship and activities should create conditions conducive to the student's engagement and encourage investment of physical and psychological energy in his studies (Cobut et al., 2009). Nonetheless, companionship assumes the student is autonomous or in control of his process and studies. The actions of the professional resource person should allow him to reflect on his methods and difficulties and to make decisions with regard to the changes that should be undertaken for improvement (Cobut et al.).

Another purpose of academic companionship is to help struggling students recover confidence. The professional resource person should assume the posture of supporter and stimulator of the student's learning and progress. The nature of the relationship between

student and companion as well as the activities suggested to the student should help him recognize the value of his knowledge base and skills (Glasman, 2001). It should also foster a better understanding of his own learning style, his study methods and habits. In this endeavour, Cobut and colleagues (2009) favour an approach wherein the companion avoids being prescriptive and uses questions to help the student reflect on and regulate his own methods and strategies.

Beyond the promotion of student self-confidence, the process of academic companionship, by advocating practices of doing *with* rather than doing *for*, seeks to help the student develop and preserve his dignity and independence and to take ownership of his education and progress (Glasman, 2001). Correspondingly, literature on intrusive – otherwise known as highly involved – advising proposes that the process should promote the development of internal locus of control and responsibility by helping understand the relationship between the student's actions and his academic performance (Vander Schee, 2007).

In line with Tinto's (2006-2007) recommendation that retention activities must be integrated within the mainstream of institutional academic life, the literature on academic companionship suggests that the actions, activities, and strategies proposed by the professional resource person should complement the student's regular academic pursuits. For instance, it should be considered that note taking in a math class is highly different than note taking in a sociology class. Therefore, for strategies to be effective and relevant in the student's daily activities, they must be adapted to his context (e.g., field of study, study habits, schedule, number of classes taken, amount of time available; Cobut et al., 2009).

The francophone literature proposes a notion of academic support that I translated with the expression *academic companionship* following Wolfelt's (1999, 2004; 2009)

conceptualization. Academic companioning is described as a counselling approach that capitalizes on the support relationship and advocates doing with, rather than doing for. This comprehensive, personalized and individualized approach to academic support seeks to help the student take ownership of his progress and regain confidence in his capacities as a student.

An academic companioning program (ACP).

Most universities face difficulties in relation to student success and persistence. At U of O, where this study took place, the Student Academic Success Service personnel in collaboration with a group of researchers developed and implemented a program aimed at assisting students on academic probation⁵. The ACP⁶ favoured a personalized and structured approach. As will be further described, this program operated on a one-on-one basis, considered the student and his lived experience through the support process, and focused on broad support dimensions informed by the literature on academic attrition. In line with more and more authors' contention (Heerman & Maleki, 1994; James & Graham, 2010; Lindsay, 2000; Newton, 1990; Shao et al, 2009-2010; Vander Schee's, 2007), ACP viewed probationary students holistically and took into account their experiences in academic and non-academic domains.

ACP was offered to students who were asked to withdraw from their program of study due to (a) a CGPA below the minimum required by the university, (b) failure in courses totalling 18 credits, or (c) second failure of a compulsory course (Philion, Leblanc,

⁵ The implementation of this program was made possible thanks to a research grant from the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL).

⁶ For the purpose of protecting the participants' anonymity, I do not use the program's name in this dissertation but preferred the expression academic companioning program and the abbreviation ACP to simplify reading.

Bourassa, 2007, University of Ottawa, n.d., b). However, students who made, and won the appeal of their mandatory withdrawal received a status of academic probation and were granted the possibility to remain registered in their program of studies but required to obtain appropriate support through ACP during the fall 2007 term. Their situation was precarious. Given their probationary status, they had, in the duration of the session, to enhance their CGPA and/or pass a compulsory course previously failed. They would otherwise be dismissed from their program of study. Students received support for one term and it was hoped that this period would provide them with tools and strategies allowing them to continue on a path to academic success. However, it has been argued that between semesters is a critical time to offer academic support, as students tend to leave higher education institutions more frequently between school sessions. Without the structure and support of their institution they may feel isolated and lose sight of their goals or directions (Garing, 1993).

For the students involved in this study, participating in the ACP represented a final opportunity to remain registered in their program and pursue their undergraduate studies. While some support programs operate on a voluntary basis, (Hildreth, 2006; Humphrey, 2005-2006; Preuss & Switalski, 2008) others are compulsory for students in academic jeopardy (Ryan & Glenn, 2002-2003). The importance of mandatory participation is advocated as it is believed to improve the attendance rates and to help students take support programs seriously (Austin et al., 1997; Kamphoff et al., 2006-2007; Hutson, 2006). However, other authors highlight that, although the compulsory condition is intended to instigate positive outcomes, they often draw resistance from students and foster an unhealthy advising relationship (Butler, 1999; Schwebel et al., 2008).

The ACP offered individual academic companionship with a resource person on a weekly basis. In agreement with authors who advocate that academic advising is more effective when performed by professional resource persons, rather than by professors who tend to focus on teaching and research (Vander Schee, 2007), the academic companion in this study was an experienced learning specialist. The frequency and regularity of the ACP meetings is coherent with research findings indicating that intrusive⁷ interventions are associated with higher increases in CGPA (Molina & Abelman, 2000; Vander Schee) and higher retention rates (Molina & Abelman, 2000). As noted earlier, an individualized support format is recommended by other authors because it allows the student to feel connected to a representative of the institution (Preuss & Switalski, 2008). This being said, it is also argued that this design does not allow connecting the student with peers experiencing similar concerns and difficulties (Kamphoff et al., 2006-2007). According to those contentions, one could reason that the format of the ACP fostered students' integration in the academic system but not particularly in the social system of the university (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 1993).

Through these regular meetings the student and the academic companion worked together with the purpose to facilitate the student's short and long term academic success. His needs and goals for the academic session were clarified in the first two meetings, which allowed establishing a personalized and structured learning plan for the student. Based on identified needs, he received help with regard to the five broad support dimensions of the program (Phillion et al., 2007). According to the literature, these dimensions covered the multitude of challenges experienced by struggling students and included (a) defining or

⁷ The term *intrusive* designates a highly involved advising process and is used to contrast with the traditionally prescriptive advising approach in the U.S. literature (Allen & Smith, 2008; Crookston, 1994; Vander Schee, 2007).

refining academic and/or professional goals, (b) developing essential learning strategies, (c) enhancing course content knowledge, (d) improving writing skills, and (e) examining personal challenges. In line with Tinto's (2006-2007) argument that retention activities must be integrated within campus and institutional life, the ACP proposed a format incorporating the existing success services offered to student (e.g., Academic Writing Help Centre, Access Service, Career Services, Counselling and Coaching service, Experiential Learning Service, Student Mentoring). Therefore, to satisfy the student's needs, the academic companion would encourage him to take advantage of the available tools and services on campus.

By offering support for the duration of one academic term and weekly one-on-one meetings, the ACP favoured individual attention and ongoing monitoring to the student as promoted by Lindsay (2000). This fostered the development of rapport between the companion and student, which is essential to the support relationship (Cobut et al., 2009; Lindsay, 2000). In agreement with the notion of academic companioning described above, the companion sought to understand the student's experience in and outside of academia and offer support in relation to the program dimensions encompassing student challenges (Philion et al., 2007). Through a dialogic and collaborative companioning process, the student and the companion worked together to understand the student's needs and develop a personalized plan to meet those needs. An underlying purpose of this process was to trigger the student's reflection through the meetings and reflective journaling. In line with the literature on academic companioning, it was hoped that the student would reflect and learn about himself, his learning style, methods, and strategies, as well as his experience in higher education (Philion et al., 2007).

As it is the case with other probationary programs reviewed above, the ACP's theoretical foundation is rooted in the literature on student retention and attrition. This body

of literature helps understand the reality of students in academic jeopardy. Although it seems natural to assume that students on academic probation simply struggle, the situation is likely more complex. As mentioned earlier, authors distinguished different forms of leaving (Tinto, 1975; Vaughan, 1968; Wintre et al., 2006). Specifically, while academic dismissal is generally related to poor grade performance, voluntary withdrawal is linked to a lack of congruency with the academic and social norms and climate of the institution (Tinto, 1975) and types of departure are associated with different dispositions (Vaughan, 1968). The students who participated in this investigation were on the verge of academic dismissal but wished to persevere and complete their undergraduate studies. Also established earlier, the status of academic probation represents a transition between unsatisfactory performance and good academic standing or dismissal. The complexity and potential range of conditions characterizing the reality of academic probation manifests the need to study and understand the particular, unique, and distinctive experiences of students on academic probation.

Gaps in the Literature

As previously mentioned, much of the research on academic probation focuses on reasons for being placed on academic probation and programs implemented to assist probationary students. This focus, together with the predominantly quantitative and descriptive nature of this body of literature means that little research is carried out on the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation. This constitutes a gap in the scientific literature, which is particularly weighty given the professionals' and practitioners' preoccupation with academic probation as lived by students. One anecdotic piece, comments the despair, shame, and apology an academic dean witnesses in students visiting her to discuss their probationary status (Glasser, 2009). A reflective paper draws attention to the vulnerability of probationary students due to the underlying

embarrassment, fear, and nervousness they experience (Zuzelo, 2000). An informational document interested in the psychological impact of academic probation highlights that probation harms students' sense of self and well-being (Nance, 2007) and finally, a Belgian paper indicates that self-esteem is lower in struggling students when compared to a control group (Dozot, Piret, & Romainville, 2009).

This literature reflects an interest in an intimate dimension of academic probation. It appears that practitioners are concerned by student's personal experience with academic probation. Few authors mention the negative feelings (e.g., despair and embarrassment) observed in probationary students and the damaging effects of academic probation (Butler, 1999; Cruise, 2002; Ryan & Glenn, 2002-2003). However, these texts do not further describe the experience of academic probation. Understanding the perspective of those directly involved with academic probation is important. In fact, students are an integral part of the university culture and they are at the heart of concerted efforts and academic support modalities (Balduf, 2009; Gallé & Lingard, 2010). In the field of research on underachievement, authors have argued that, to shed new light on the issue, researchers should cast labels aside and focus on the perspective of students (Neumeister & Hébert, 2003). Accordingly, I content that an understanding of the phenomenon of academic probation from the perspective of those involved in it (Merriam, 2009) is crucial and timely.

A second gap pertains to the available literature on the theme under investigation. Much of the research carried out on academic probation relies on the body of literature on academic attrition. Although literature on the specific theme of academic probation is somewhat limited, I have listed several articles and dissertations, which allow grasping the state of affairs of this developing area of research. Hence, I believe that a sound investigation

on the theme of academic probation should review, analyze, and critique the available literature on this specific topic.

A third gap in the literature concerns research traditions. Although authors have recently argued the need for qualitative methodologies in studies on academic probation (Douglas College, 2002; Shao et al, 2009-2010), investigations on the topic are predominantly quantitative and not conducive to an in-depth understanding of academic probation. In the field of underachievement, Schultz (2002) similarly observes that research is diagnostic in nature, largely focused on comparison of groups (e.g., achievers and non-achievers) and “remain[s] a mysterious concoction of factors such as motivation, family relations, home backgrounds, mental health, and personality differences” (p. 204). In view of the limited scope of research on academic probation, I concur with Schultz in endorsing an approach to research that seeks to develop an understanding of the complexity of the phenomenon while respecting the individuality and the humanity of those implicated. A qualitative methodology interested in the experience, perspective and voice of individuals involved with academic probation is a step in the right direction to cater this gap.

Finally, Vander Schee (2007) recently underlined that the probationary students’ experience should not be overlooked. In the same line of thought, one study sought to understand the complexities of academic probation (Thomas, 2003). This investigation explored the experience of 10 undergraduate students from an Ontario University who had been on academic probation and overcame it. The findings of this in-depth study allow better appreciating the intricacy of academic probation. However, this investigation was largely based on deficits as well as treatment and intervention approaches. Although this inquiry reports rich portraits of struggling students overcoming probation, I propose that an exploration of the experience of students on academic probation should rely on a sound

theory of experience, which represents a fourth gap in recent literature. Dewey's theory of experience (1934/2005, 1938/1997, 1958) is favoured in the current investigation for its pedagogical perspective on experience as it positions the individual as a proactive actor in an environmental context, an actor who learns, adapts, and grows in the face of experience. Furthermore, by prompting an interest in the individual's context and meaning of experience, Dewey's theory allows delving into the heart of experience.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underlying this investigation is based on Dewey's works on experience. Dewey's thought is holistic and organic, making it uneasy to partition aspects of his theory (Garrison, 1996). However, to simplify the presentation and reading of the central dimensions of Dewey's theory of experience, I have created an artificial divide within the theory to structure its presentation and integration in further chapters of the thesis. This simulated sectioning was created purely for the purpose of presentation and ease of understanding. The theory of experience, however, should be conceived as a unified whole. It should be noted that the constituent dimensions of the deweyan theory of experience will be reintegrated into a cohesive entity in the findings chapter. For the time being, this chapter on the theoretical framework discusses Dewey's view on education and examines key concepts of his theory of experience that suit the investigation of the conditions and experience undergone by students who have been placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship. Following this, a conceptual definition of academic companionship will be offered as its importance emerged as central in this study.

Dewey's theory of experience

In the early 20th century, Dewey criticized traditional education and its philosophy of teaching as transmitting information, instilling conformity, and establishing patterns of organization. He contended that these features of traditional education were not conducive to cultivation of identity or developing a passion for learning. In reaction to an educational model based on imposing standards, learning materials, and methods, he argued for a new philosophy of education (Dewey, 1938/1997). He claimed that, to be fully efficient, schools should provide students with opportunities for participation in conjoint activities. He

believed this allows acquiring a “social sense of their own powers and the materials and appliances used” (Dewey, 1916/2005).

Dewey advocated that the individual’s participation in the social consciousness allows him to gradually join in the intellectual and moral resources established by his society and inherit the funded capital of civilization (1897a). His pedagogic creed proposed that true education results from the stimulation of the individual’s powers through experience. Enabling the student to make use of his abilities to manage situations allows preparing him for future events, knowing he can rely on his full capacities in further conditions and experience.

To fully grasp Dewey’s theory of experience, one must first consider what experience is. The philosopher offers the following eloquent description of experience.

(...) it includes *what* men do and suffer, *what* they strive for, love, believe, and endure, and also *how* men act and are acted upon, the ways in which they do and suffer, desire and enjoy, see, believe, imagine – in short, processes of *experiencing*. “Experience” denotes the planted field, the sowed seeds, the reaped harvests, the changes of night and day, spring and autumn, wet and dry, heat and cold, that are observed, feared, longed for; it also denotes the one who plants and reaps, who works and rejoices, hopes, fears, plans, invokes magic or chemistry to aid him, who is downcast or triumphant (Dewey, 1958, p. 8).

Thus, everything a person acts upon and undergoes, all that has meaning for the person, and that evokes emotions and attitudes constitutes experience. Dewey (1934/2005) also defined *an* experience. According to his writings, an experience occurs when it reaches the purpose for which it was intended and runs its course to completion, such as a piece of work that is completed to satisfaction, a game that is played through, or any situation that is “so rounded

out that its close is a consummation and not a cessation” (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 37). An experience has a satisfying emotional quality linked to integration and fulfillment of ordered movement. However, things that are experienced do not certainly constitute an experience. Oftentimes, what is experienced is “inchoate” (p. 36) and what is desired does not align with what takes place.

Paying attention to experience as it is posited in the theory presented here has great value in scientific inquiry as it brings to light a source of data that would otherwise remain concealed. Metaphorically, Dewey demonstrates that a focus on experience allows the inquirer to gain access to a form of information that is inaccessible to the researcher who ignores the depth and significance of experience. I cite Dewey once again, as I believe paraphrasing his words would not convey the extent of his own articulation of this thought on the matter.

These commonplaces take on significance when the relation of experience to the formation of a philosophic theory of nature is in question. They indicate that experience, if scientific inquiry is justified, is no infinitesimally thin layer or foreground of nature, but that it penetrates into it, reaching down into its depths, and in such a way that its grasp is capable of expansion; it tunnels in all directions and in so doing brings to the surface things at first hidden – as miners pile high on the surface of the earth treasures brought from below (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 2a-3a).

Growth.

In this theory of experience, the notion of growth is essential. Dewey sees in the individual a capacity, a potentiality, a positive force to develop. People have the power to learn from experience and draw lessons that can be applied to further situations to better manage them. In other words, the person adjusts to the environment and does so by means of

an active sense of control. This denotes that growth is seen as something the individual does; is not seen as being done to him (1916/2005).

For education to respect conditions of growth, it should be intended as a fostering, nurturing or cultivating process (Dewey, 1916/2005). Experiences are considered educative when they create conditions and opportunities where the individual develops physically and intellectually. Educative experiences promote favourable pursuits and purposes in concordance with moral development. Acquiring skills is necessary but not sufficient to foster growth. For instance, experiences leading an individual to become a skilful burglar are not considered educative. Each experience is a moving force, but its value can only be judged on the ground of what it moves toward to (Dewey, 1938/1997).

While educative experiences lead to growth, others are mis-educative in that they produce a lack of sensitivity or responsiveness to further experiences and result in boredom, inactivity, or a careless attitude. Accordingly, mis-educative experiences restrict the possibilities of having rich future experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997). This issue is of prime importance in the context of academic probation whereby students struggle to succeed in university. The following pages elaborate on the principles of interaction and continuity as bases of the theory of experience. These descriptions help the reader understand how experience may promote growth or restrict future endeavours (Dewey, 1938/1997).

The principle of interaction.

Dewey proposed that experience takes form at the junction of individual and nature. In his view, the very process of living involves the interaction of the individual with envioning conditions (Dewey, 1934/2005). Within this perspective, the person and his environment are viewed in an “unanalysed totality” (Dewey, 1958, p. 8). To illustrate his view of experience encompassing person and nature Dewey exemplifies, for instance, the

experience of breathing which includes both the lungs taking breaths and the air breathed, or in the experience of savouring which is accomplished by means of taste buds detecting perception and food consumed. In this manner, experience is necessarily an interplay between the individual's internal states and his environmental conditions (Dewey, 1938/1997). Consistent with Dewey's description of interaction, Heideggerian existentialism considers that the person is in indissoluble relatedness with the world and describes an interwoven connection between individual and environment. Removing one dimension of this relationship leaves the other senseless (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989).

In this interplay, the internal states of the individual include needs, desires, purposes, and capacities. The environmental conditions concern other individuals and objects with which the person interacts as well as the nature of these interactions (Dewey, 1938/1997). Indeed, we always know, love, and act in relation to objects and individuals (Dewey, 1958). These two sets of factors are considered equally important; none dominates. The environmental conditions should not be subordinated nor be given primacy over the inclinations of the individual.

The theory of experience emphasizes that transactions with the environmental conditions should be conducive to growth, that is, they should promote the learner's receptivity to future rich experiences. The Deweyan philosophy of education contends that positive human relations are vital for growth promoting experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997). Interactions with others include what is done and the way it is done. For instance, the lesson as well as the attitude and tone of voice of the teacher are part of the student's environmental conditions. Dewey's theory proposes that the learner's internal conditions (e.g., needs and feelings) should be considered within transactions to foster optimal learning (Dewey,

1938/1997). Fostering positive internal conditions arguably promotes the person's openness and accordingly cultivates growth.

The principle of interaction postulates that experience originates at the interface between the individual and his environment. Accepting that assumption, the account of experience necessarily requires an appreciation of these two components. To be specific, the meaning held by the individual as well as the environmental situation must be apprehended and outlined in order to offer a credible view of experience as theorized by Dewey (Garrison, 1996). Experience cannot be understood as an isolated entity (Johnson, 2000).

Context

Context plays a central role in Dewey's theory of experience. Elements of context comprise the surrounding situation of the individual that sets the background tone against which the experience is played. They are taken to include temporal conditions of the environment given as culture, tradition, and habits that have value in a specified epoch, and spatial conditions of located animate and inanimate setting perceived by the individual, such as objects, people, symbols, and events (Dewey, 1958, 1931/1998). The contextual details of environment are of import because they permeate experience, carrying out a powerful influence on it. Dewey expounds that experience takes form through interaction with conditions of environment. Even more so, it is the environmental context itself that is experienced. "It is not experience which is experienced, but nature – stones, plants, animals, diseases, health, temperature, electricity, and so on. Things interacting in certain ways *are* experience; they are what is experienced" (Dewey, 1958, p. 4a). Thus, to understand experience, proper attention must be given to the contextual elements that qualify, characterize, and render experience tangible (Dewey, 1931/1998).

An appreciation of the particular conditions of this environment is indispensable in the endeavor to understand experience. Conceiving of experience in and of itself reduces it and deprives it from its significance (Dewey, 1958). Such neglect to consider the context of an experience leads to misinterpretation (Dewey, 1931/1998). It leaves a caricatural world that is devoid of human interest because of a disconnect from experience (1958).

Meaning

In the interplay between the individual and his environment, the person's internal states and subjectivities (e.g., needs, desires, and purposes) transform objective things of the environment by imparting significance to them (Dewey, 1958, 1930/1998). While these internal states belong to the individual holding them, they necessarily concern the content of the environment. Recognizing the very special feature of the human mind, the individual's perception and interpretation is a key feature of Dewey's theory of experience (Dewey, 1934/2005). It considers that the "outer world" impresses and stimulates the "inner mind" (Dewey, 1958, p. 10), that is, the individual's own mental operations, such as purposes and beliefs play a significant role in the way in which things, people, and events are experienced (Dewey, 1958). The qualities we attribute to objects and conditions of the environment permeate and motivate our experience in relation to them. For instance, even struggles can be appreciated and enjoyed for their developmental value even if they prove to be painful. Conditions of resistance can carry satisfying qualities in a process of improvement and growth, depending on the meaning associated to it (Dewey, 1934/2005). Given Dewey's thought and the importance he attributes to the principle of interaction but also to the meaning of the experience in view of contextual environment, it is crucial to dedicate due attention to the internal states, intents, desires, attitudes, and beliefs held by the individual whose experience we are interested in.

Accepting the principle of interaction involves an understanding that meaning is context-dependent. Correspondingly, the content or significance of experience cannot present itself as a decontextualized object. “Rather, both the experience and the meaning of that experience are embedded within a contextual whole” (Johnson, 2000, p. 140).

The principle of interaction and the role of the environmental context are recognized as having a crucial influence on the nature and meaning of the experience undergone. Research-wise, understanding this context is essential to grasp the way in which events are experienced by individuals (Dewey, 1958, 1938/1997; Garrison, 1996; Johnson, 2000). Narrative inquiry supports the principle of interaction and recognizes the importance of acknowledging contextual factors to better grasp human phenomena (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Detailing the scene, time, and place where an experience took shape, the individuals present, their attitude and perspective helps make sense of and give depth to the story of an experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1983).

The principle of continuity.

The Deweyan theory asserts that experience stretches indefinitely, each fragment of experience connected to the next. Life is not understood as a uniform uninterrupted flow. Rather, it is composed of histories each having its own color and rhythmic movement (Dewey, 1934/2005). Each moment of experience has an influence on the next and conversely, every new constituent of experience is shaped by the effects of past ones. This connection with past and future experience represents Dewey’s the principle of continuity, which proposes that every experience enacted modifies the individual (Dewey, 1938/1997). Specifically, the individual derives information from each and every fragment and uses this knowledge to form attitudes about and regulate future experiences (Dewey, 1958).

As previously detailed, the special feature of human mind, perception and interpretation inform the meaning of experience. Along with the significance imparted to objective things of the environment, the principle of continuity also assumes the influence of the perception of the relation between doing (i.e., the action) and undergoing (i.e., the consequence). In this sense, experience is impressed through the perception of the connection between what one does and what one undergoes (Dewey, 1934/2005). Each fragment of experience alters the individual's rapport with the world by influencing the construction of attitudes that are both intellectual and emotional (Dewey, 1938/1997). Perception or "taking in" (Dewey, 1934/2005, p. 42) involves more than awareness of experience, it involves "reconstruction" (p. 42) which may be pleasurable or painful, depending on the particular conditions of experience; depending on whether the event was desired or unwanted. This continuous process shapes the way one grasps and responds to life situations and makes it easier or harder to engage in specific activities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938/1997), hence the significance of the quality of educational experience for further engagement in academic activities (Dewey, 1938/1997). Logically, a student, for instance, would use previous experience to gravitate toward class material he easily grasps and takes pleasure in or to avoid future encounters with unkind classmates.

Continuity of experience is elsewhere recognized as a key component in the investigation of experience (Dewey, 1934/2005, 1938/1997, 1958; Garrison, 1996; Johnson, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) view individuals as "living storied lives on storied landscapes" (p. 24). The authors argue that, rather than paying attention to the experience lived in the here and now, framing experience as lived on a continuum allows contextualizing and apprehending it.

The principles of continuity and interactions are not separate but connected and intertwined (Dewey, 1938/1997). Each transaction and experience with the environment shapes the individual and further experiences with the environment. In other words, learned attitudes, skills, and knowledge help understand and manage future situations. In the education context, it is proposed that the physical and social environment should be organized to suit the student's needs and capacities ensuring growth-promoting experience.

Quality of experiences.

In his earlier reflections, Dewey (1897b) discussed the quality of effort exerted. He proposed that effort, defined as “putting forth of energy” (p. 47) may exist with a sense of ease, and it may as well exist with a sense of strain. He indicated that in situations of “extreme absorption and interest” (p. 47) more effort may be applied yet less effort can be felt. Objective effort and psychological effort, it seemed, did not equate. In later writings, Dewey (1938/1997) asserted that experience has an immediate agreeableness or disagreeableness, which defines the quality of experience, as well as an influence on later experience. In accordance to the principles of interaction and continuity, it is this quality that shapes experiences by setting up preferences and aversions for certain activities. Environmental conditions shape the experience with emotions and ideas through which conscious intent emerges (1934/2005), influence the individual's mindset, and mould the desire to engage in activities (Dewey, 1938/1997).

Dewey stresses the importance for students to have experiences that are enjoyable, agreeable, and desired (1938/1997). Cultivating conditions in which a student can have pleasant experiences that match his skills and that are cumulatively linked and coherent with past and future experience facilitates active involvement in academic activities, rather than mere automatic execution. It prompts enthusiasm, sensitivity, and responsiveness for future

experience and fosters their inclination to engage in future academic activities. The quality of experience thus has influential power on growth and richer experience in the future (1938/1997).

Dewey's theory of experience gives conceptual coherence to this investigation. It has provided an interpretive angle to approach the study of conditions and experience of academic probation, it has influenced the research design, which will be presented in the subsequent chapter, and it has informed the results and conclusions drawn from the data (Leshem & Trafford, 2007).

Academic Companionship

This project was initiated with the purpose to investigate the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship. In the course of the study, academic companionship arose as determining in the experience shared by the participants. A conceptual definition of academic companionship is thus offered as its importance emerged as central in this investigation. In the following pages I expose the recent need for the ancient practice of companionship, address its function, and discuss its relational dimension.

Re-emergence of companionship.

Ehrenberg (2009) strongly argued that an increase of individualization, autonomy, and competitiveness has generated a cult of performance. More and more, professionals must find ways to mobilize the appropriate resources to promote their own economic and social success. The growing importance attributed to values of personal success and keenness engenders solitude and tension, fuels psychological suffering, and weakens the individual. Other societal pressures produce confusion and vulnerability in young adults. The Internet and modern modes of communication have, in many situations, replaced face-to-face

encounters further generating solitude (Boutinet, 2007a). Moreover, the disintegration of institutional hierarchies affords the possibility to become autonomous but societal expectation of being self-determined in producing optimal outcomes may create disconcerting uncertainties (Bourassa, Cifalis, & Théberge, 2010; Pasquier, 2001; Pineau, 2007). Finally, typical, stable, or linear professional itineraries are not a norm nowadays and the young adult must prepare to face professional transitions and retraining, which may be experienced as unsettling (Boutinet, 2007b). Overall, today's students and professionals' environment, complex as it is, warrants the need for companionship (Boutinet, 2007a; Le Bouëdec & Pasquier, 2001).

Function of companionship.

To cater to the current needs and issues above-mentioned, authors and practitioners have turned to the ancient practice of companionship⁸. Companionship adopts multiple forms, aims, and contexts over the centuries (Le Bouëdec, 2001a). A common element of the practices however, appears to be the provision of fraternal warmth and solidarity in response to an individual's search for meaning and direction in the midst of life's major transitions (Le Bouëdec, 2007). Given the intricate issues facing today's students and professionals, authors seek new ways to implement the ancient practice of companionship rather than searching for new practices (Bouëdec, 2007; Paul, 2007; Pineau, 2007).

Confusion exists surrounding the notion of companionship as other practices and terms (e.g., coaching, tutoring, mentoring) abound that are similar in terminology and in operationalization (du Crest, 2001; Paul, 2002, 2004). However, elements of definition are

⁸ The label companionship is used in this document as I feel it justly translates the practice termed *accompagnement* in the francophone literature.

being proposed. Companionship is described as a process that is sequential but not linear as it is guided by the specificity needs, purposes, and capacities of the student (du Crest, 2001; Le Bouëdec & Pasquier, 2001; Paul, 2002). It generally takes place when transition or fragility appear. In fact, Boutinet (2007a) proposes that companionship is sought to enhance performance or cater needs related to a difficulty or deficit. In either situation, it is believed that the process and relationship of companionship improves well-being as it fosters transformation of the individual by assisting him in developing his potential and acquiring adapted ways of thinking or doing (Boutinet, 2007b; Lafortune et Martin, 2004; Paul, 2002, 2004; Peters, Leblanc, Chevrier, Fortin, & Kennedy, 2007). This is accomplished through encounters and dialogue in which the companion offers genuine attention and acceptance, helps clarify and uncover meaning held by the individual, and supports the confirmation of this new meaning (Le Bouëdec, 2001b). This aligns with the Deweyan theory presented above, which proposes that fostering positive internal conditions is conducive to openness to future rich experiences (Dewey, 1933/1997, 1938/1997). Arguably, companionship helps the student understand and manage future situations by gaining a sense of control over his capacities and resources (Boutinet, 2007b; Dewey, 1916/2005, 1938/1997).

Companionship relationship.

The relational dimension is central to companionship (Le Bouëdec, 2001c; Paul, 2004; Peters et al., 2007). The type of presence portrayed in the companionship relationship honours the person being companioned. It is a specific posture that implies harmonizing with, supporting, and helping reach one's goal. It provides an attentive, welcoming, warm, and accepting presence (Le Bouëdec, 2001b) and is unconditionally centered on the companioned person in a holistic and non-judgmental manner (Bourassa et al., 2010; Le Bouëdec, 2001d). In this sense, companionship has a socialising effect (Pasquier, 2001),

which is coherent with the Deweyan perspective. In fact, companioning provides an opportunity to participate in shared activity and join in the community he is part of, or transitioning in (Dewey, 1897a).

The nature of the companion-companioned relationship is complex and paradoxical. Boutinet (2007a) characterised it as “quasi-horizontal” (p. 6), as an informal symmetry masks an imbalance in comfort, competence, or expertise. It is not hierarchical, however, it is skewed; partakers are of parallel statuses but one party benefits from comfort, knowledge, or know-how whereas the other is in a position of vulnerability or fragility (Boutinet, 2007a; Le Bouëdec, 2001d; Paul, 2002). In this blurry unevenness, a liberating outcome resides in the mutual engagement in a companioning partnership (Bourassa et al., 2010; Lafortune & Martin, 2004; Paul, 2002).

As explained above, in a postmodern society, the adult feels the damaging effects of solitude. In the face of high social and professional expectations, the individual is required to be self-reliant and self-determined (Ehrenberg, 2009). This precarious situation stresses the need for companioning (Boutinet, 2007b; Le Bouëdec, 2007). Paradoxically, the notion of companioning evokes vulnerability and dependence of the companioned. However, the practice of companioning seeks to generate autonomy and personal initiative in a safe and secure setting of collaboration (Boutinet, 2007c; Lafortune & Martin, 2004; Peters et al., 2007). Placing the companioned in a position of agent invites the companioned person to acknowledge his powers in the fulfillment of his own project (Boutinet, 2007c; Paul, 2004; Pasquier, 2001). The companioned person is required to involve himself in metacognitive reflection (Lafortune & Martin, 2004; Lhotellier, 2007; Peters et al., 2007) and to implement a course of action and confront the uncertainties tied to possibilities and constraints of his pursuit (Boutinet, 2007c). It is highlighted that the learner’s ability to take ownership of his

intent is key in promoting growth (Le Bouëdec, 2001d). The importance attributed to the development of autonomy is supported by the Deweyan theory of experience. Taking advantage of one's sense of his own powers allows him to engage and rally the necessary resources that will shape emotions, ideas and conscious intent thus transforming him (Dewey, 1934/2005). The practice of companionship enables the student to exploit and trust his abilities to manage situations, thus preparing him for future engagements (Dewey, 1897a, 1916/2005).

In sum, I centred this investigation on a framework that focuses on key elements of Dewey's theory of experience, that is, growth, the principle of interaction, the principle of continuity, and the quality of experience. This frame has proven its efficacy in understanding experience. First, Dewey sees in the individual a potentiality to develop that can be promoted through fostering conditions. In addition, the principle of interaction helps situate the student in context and acknowledge the role of internal individual states. Also, the principle of continuity proposes that each fragment of experience is connected to the next and carries influence and meaning. Finally, the quality of experience, moulds experience with emotions and ideas and individuates one's engagement with the environment. Given the emergent importance of academic companionship in the participants' stories, a conceptual definition of companionship supplements the theoretical framework. More specifically its function and relational dimension exemplify Dewey's theory of experience.

Chapter 4: Methodological Framework

As demonstrated earlier, literature on academic probation is still limited and exploratory. Research carried out on the topic mainly uses quantitative procedures, which are not conducive to an in-depth understanding of experience. However, authors have recently underlined the need to carry out qualitative studies to add depth to the understanding of academic probation (Thomas, 2003; Vander Schee, 2007) and to focus on a more intimate dimension of academic probation (Glasser, 2009; Nance, 2007; Zuzelo, 2000). Correspondingly, the present investigation used a qualitative approach to understand the theme of academic probation as it is apprehended by those involved with the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 2005).

The purpose of this investigation was to investigate the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship. In line with the theoretical framework, the conditions and experience encountered by probationary students include the students' journey through the school and university, their placement on academic probation, as well as their course through the ACP in which they participated while on probation.

Human phenomena such as subjective experiences are deep-seated and not readily observable. As it is further described in the following pages, the interpretive nature of qualitative research allows making sense of human phenomena. Furthermore, social constructivism with its attention to personal constructions is in line with the inquiry's purpose. Finally, the qualitative case study was particularly fitting as it is concerned with personal experience.

This methodological chapter details the approaches that informed the development of this project, that is, the qualitative research perspective, the social constructivist paradigm, and

the qualitative case study. A description of the procedures of inquiry, namely, the participants, the data collection and the data analysis follows. Then, researcher preparation, trustworthiness, and limitations will be discussed.

Research Tradition – Qualitative Research

The natural science model and its positivistic approach have traditionally dominated the research field. This view, inspired by the Cartesian dualism, seeks causal relationships, holds that the person is part of the objective world, and includes a belief that reality exists outside the mind. The natural science model thus proposes that meaning lies in the external world (Fischer, 1991; Karlsson, 1993). Within the fields of humanities and social sciences, dissatisfaction in regards to this conventional approach emerged because it is ill prepared to investigate the complexity and depth of human experience. This discontent gave way to the development of the human science model, which is more appropriate to understand human phenomena and their meaning (Chessick, 1990; Karlsson, 1993). This “soft” science model contrasts with the natural or hard science model by focusing on the personal perspective and the lived experience and by arguing that reality is multiple and relative. It allows tapping into the complexity of the diverse, the irregular, the particular and thus, it is more appropriate to the study of human experience (Karlsson, 1993).

Traditional research based on a God’s-eye view of reality aroused dissatisfaction among many scholars who contended that the experimental quantitative model was ill suited to examine the complexities and subtleties of social life (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, 2005a). Debate and criticism of traditional quantitative research gave way to the emergence of a new form of inquiry, that is, qualitative research, which locates the inquirer in the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b). Qualitative inquirers study objects in their natural settings to make sense of human

phenomena and are particularly concerned with meaning attributed to these phenomena by the people experiencing them.

Qualitative research is interpretive in nature. Participants are the first interpreters of the information they share; they tell a story based on their construction of their realities (Atkinson, 2002). In addition, investigators select, analyze, and interpret the data they collect and present. Readers are also called to interpret research reports (Creswell, 2007). In qualitative investigations, subjective, experience-near interpretive analyses are viewed as a fundamental strength, particularly in the field of education (Merriam, 1988). Only a human, due to his adaptability and awareness could grasp respondents' constructions and participate in the reconstructions or co-constructions of meaning (Rodwell, 1998). Understanding human phenomena has a deep psychological connotation and requires awareness, empathy, and closeness to the theme under study. Understanding is a very personal process that cannot be separated from the person creating it (Stake, 1995). Schwandt (1994; 2000) even suggests that understanding is itself interpretation.

Research Paradigm – Social Constructivism

The paradigm is a basic belief system influenced by ontological, epistemological, and methodological principles that guide all aspects of research implementation (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). A constructivist, and more specifically, a social constructivist paradigm provided grounding to this investigation. With regard to the nature of reality, social constructivists hold that knowledge emerges in transactions with meaningful encounters (both animate and inanimate), and is necessarily multiple, relative and intangible (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Knowledge is socially and experientially based, and contingent upon the interactions of the individual. Although personal constructions are deemed meaningful, they may be more or less complete. However, they are alterable, that is, they transform and evolve through

encounters and experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). According to this paradigm, we construct the world we live in on the basis of experience. Meaning is relative to the idiosyncratic perspective of the individual constructing it and should be understood against the larger context background in which it takes place (Shkedi, 2005).

Concerning the relationship between the inquirer and knowledge, constructivists propose that knowledge is tributary of interaction. What one sees, hears and feels is the result of his perception and reflection on transactions with individuals and the environment (Glaserfeld, 2005). The individual is seen as meaning-making, hence, constructivism is described as subjectivist. The action of making meaning takes place in an environment and is directed at objects, symbols and individuals, rendering the process transactional (Glaserfeld, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Constructivists, particularly social constructivists, advocate that humans are social beings and that their cognitive being and becoming cannot be understood without considering their context (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). Indeed, proponents of this paradigm recognize the holistic nature and complexity of phenomena. It is fundamental for researchers to preserve this complexity and acknowledge the context of a phenomenon to understanding the nature and reality of this phenomenon (Shkedi, 2005).

On the question of how to gain access to what can be known about the object of research this paradigm indicates that knowledge can be elicited and refined through interactions and dialogue (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). As ideas are shared, the social surrounding fosters, probes, and intensifies the individual's reflection and meaning making. Although knowledge is unique to the individual, social constructivists advocate that it is connected to and influenced by the environment and social context (Fosnot & Perry, 2005). In terms of research, the relative and transactional nature of knowledge dictates hermeneutical and dialectical methodologies. Meaning or constructions can be elicited or refined by way of

interaction between researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Researchers are seen as the main instrument to gather data by getting close to the phenomenon under study. Specifically, everyday life from the insiders' standpoint is the essential focus of research. Watching, talking, and listening to those involved in a phenomenon of interest is a powerful way to understand human phenomena (Shkedi, 2005). In transactional and dialectical methodologies, respondents construct answers, stories, and meaning with the collaboration of the listener, or the researcher (Riessman, 2008).

Constructivism proposes that knowledge grows (rather than accumulates) through dialectical exchanges wherein constructions become more sophisticated and refined (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This view contrasts with the metaphor of building blocks wherein the blocks represent pieces of knowledge that are piled into a mound without necessarily building anything concrete or useful. Within a social constructivist perspective, knowledge is constructed, co-constructed, or reconstructed through exchanges and dialogues between inquirer and participants.

Strategy of Inquiry – Qualitative Case Study

Qualitative case study is interested in the specific *one* and is concerned with current human phenomena (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 2005). Some authors agree that a case is bound by time and place (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 2005) while others remind us that the boundaries between a case and its context are not always clear (Yin, 2003). To assuage this issue, an emphasis on contextual conditions facilitates the understanding of the phenomenon itself and its delimitations (Cresswell, 1998; Yin, 2003).

An essential characteristic of the qualitative case study is its in-depth feature, which is valued for its explanatory potency (Karsenti & Demers, 2004; Merriam, 1988). Depth is achieved by offering thorough descriptions relating to the case. These descriptions are

qualitative, that is, they take literary form such as quotes and documentation to depict events, evoke images, and analyze situations (Merriam, 1988). Qualitative case study is also naturalistic, meaning that it focuses on natural settings, real-life contexts and complex social issues (Karsenti & Demers, 2004; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). It is holistic, which means that the researcher seeks to understand how parts of an entity (i.e., the phenomenon and its environment) work together to form a whole (Stake, 2005).

The fundamental objective of the qualitative case study is to understand the meaning individuals attribute to their experience (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005). The qualitative case study researcher thus seeks to understand and represent what the participants' lives are like and what it means for them to be in a particular context or situation. Within this research strategy, it is assumed that meaning is embedded in personal experiences, requires depth of understanding, and is mediated by the inquirer's perception (Merriam, 1988).

Stake (2005) proposes that a case cannot be fully understood without knowing about other cases, illustrating the value of multiple case studies. Creswell (2012) suggests using a maximum of four or five cases in a study. I thus endeavoured to recruit six participants, anticipating withdrawals. Five responded to the recruitment letter and completed the multiple interview protocol.

Procedures

The following section first presents the participants of this investigation. It then describes the data collection procedures, more specifically, how primary (i.e., multiple in-depth interviews with students) and supplementary (i.e., single in-depth interviews with professional resource personnel, document analysis, and researcher journal) data were collected. Finally, the data analysis procedures are explained.

Participants.

The purpose of this inquiry was to better understand the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship. Choosing participants⁹ who are knowledgeable about the research topic (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), I solicited the participation of undergraduate students and professional resource personnel involved in the ACP. The participants of this study thus form a convenience sample, that is, they were chosen based on their access and willingness to participate (Schwandt, 2007). As described earlier, the program was offered to students who had been asked to withdraw from their program of study due to a CGPA under their university's requirements or too many failed credits. After an appeal, the university had granted them the possibility to remain registered in their program of study in the fall term of 2007, provided they received adequate assistance through an academic support program. To maintain their student status beyond that term, they necessarily had to enhance their CGPA and pass all their classes (University of Ottawa, n.d., b).

In the fall 2008, a recruitment letter (Appendix B) was sent by email to all students participating in the ACP. Five participants responded to this contact and accepted to take part in the current study after signing a consent form (Appendix C). They studied in various academic programs and included four women and one man. At the time of the data collection they were in their 2nd to 4th year of study and between 21 and 23 years old¹⁰. They attended

⁹ The term "participant" is used in this thesis to reflect the active stance of the persons being interviewed as well as the sense of equity I sought to create with them (Seidman, 2006).

¹⁰ One student did not disclose her age but shared that she was admitted to university the year following her high school graduation, as was the case with all student participants. She was likely in the same age range of 21 to 23 years old.

in a bilingual university, two of the students were Francophone and three were Anglophone. Further detail on the participants' socio-demographic and academic information is provided in Appendix D. The pseudonyms Mark, Manelle, Eva, Leena and Anny were used in this document to protect their anonymity. These five students' perspective represents the core data in this inquiry.

To better understand the probationary experience, I interviewed the companion who worked with the five students. The academic companion was a Learning Specialist with a background in counselling and psychopedagogy. She was fluent in both French and English and had 11 years of experience with the Student Academic Success Service at U of O. The pseudonym Connie was attributed to her.

An interview with the developer of the ACP was also conducted. The purpose of this interview was to collect information to further contextualize the students' experience. The program developer was a Learning Specialist with a background in psychopedagogy. She was dedicated to companioning in higher education and had 18 years of experience in the field. In her functions within the Learning Support Program within the Student Academic Success Service at U of O, she elaborated and implemented a number of smaller scale programs to assist at-risk students. With this added experience, she developed the ACP, a personalized and structured program for students in academic jeopardy. The pseudonym Denise was used in this text to refer to the program developer.

The academic companion and the program developer were asked verbally if they were interested to participate in an interview as part of my research project. Both accepted and I later contacted them to establish a meeting time and place at which point I sent them a recruitment letter including information on the study and interview. They participated in this investigation after signing a consent form

Social constructivism (Fosnot & Perry, 2005) views the inquirer as a facilitator in the creation of constructs. This paradigm is based on the tenet that both respondents and interviewer work together to create, co-create, or re-create a reality. Therefore, I, the researcher was also seen as a participant in this inquiry. At the time of the interviews, I was in my 3rd year in the doctoral program in the Faculty of Education and studied at U of O. I had completed an undergraduate degree at the School of Psychology and a Master's degree at the School of Human Kinetics. Finally, I had completed a research assistantship with the professional and research team who envisioned and implemented the ACP, and who investigated its efficacy. This research experience allowed me to familiarize myself with the program, its philosophy, and its procedures.

Data Collection.

Qualitative research suggests making use of various practices (e.g., interviews, journaling) to make the world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b). As suggested, this study made use of four practices to grasp the students' experience with academic probation. First, the main method of data collection was Seidman's three-interview series with five students on academic probation. Second, a single interview was conducted with the academic companion who worked with the five students in the ACP and another with the program developer. Third, a document analysis was undertaken. Fourth, a reflective journal was kept to document the course of action and my researcher impressions throughout the data collection. In addition, the academic companion's case notes were reviewed to substantiate the stories shared by the participants. These methods of data collection are further described in the current section.

Primary data source – Seidman's structure for in-depth qualitative interviewing.

Qualitative interviewing is a rigorous method of collecting data on human phenomena (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Balduf (2009) proposes that individual conversations

with those experiencing academic probation, is the most effective means to derive understanding of the specifics of the phenomenon. This allows delving into participants' stories and gaining access to the meaning they attribute to their personal experience (Merriam, 1988; Warren, 2002). It is acknowledged that recounting stories and experiences requires that the participant reflects on events, selects relevant details to share, and gives them order (Geertz, 1995; Seidman, 2006). For this reason, respondents are viewed as meaning makers (Warren, 2002). However, in line with the social constructivist paradigm, both researcher and respondent are considered participants in the collaborative interview process. The questions and probes of the interviewer support the respondent's meaning making and thus, the interviewer and interviewee are viewed as co-creators of an account (Fontana & Frey, 2005).

The purpose of interviewing is to derive the respondent's interpretations of experiences through guided conversation (Warren, 2002). To accomplish this, in-depth interviewing typically involves a longer, one-on-one, face-to-face exchange between the interviewer and the respondent. This format is believed to foster the development of rapport and intimacy necessary for self-disclosure. Finally, the information sought in in-depth interviews generally concerns personal matters such as the perspectives, reflections, and feelings about lived experience. Due to its length and depth, these interviews require a substantial commitment on the part of the respondents (Johnson, 2002).

Appreciating the importance of stories in a person's life, Seidman (2006) proposed a phenomenological approach to interviewing as a way to understand respondents' lived experience and the meaning attributed to it (van Manen, 1997). Stories are favoured with the reasoning that putting experience in words and anecdotes allows grasping its meaning and context. Telling life stories also has the benefit of generating and conveying insights,

reflections, feelings, and possibilities (Atkinson, 2002). The life story interviewing helps the respondent, the researcher, as well as the reader to better understand the issue under inquiry (Atkinson, 2002).

The present investigation relied on Seidman's (2006) three-interview structure to examine the stories of students on academic probation. Seidman's procedure and approach, is particularly fitting given the theoretical framework detailed above and the investigation's purpose to understand the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship. The conditions and experience undergone by students on academic probation are taken to include the participants' journey through the school and university system, their placement on academic probation, as well as their course through the ACP.

To reflect this purpose and definition of the conditions and experience encountered by the participating students, the first interview inquired on details of the participant's early experiences in school. These details allowed putting their current experience in context and better understanding their meaning. In this regard, Patton (2002) reasoned that understanding the context of an experience is imperative to delve into its meaning. The second interview focused on details of the participant's current experience with activities, social interactions, and endeavours in relation to university. Although Seidman advised to specifically inquire about concrete details in the first and second interviews, the respondents participating in this project tended to spontaneously discuss how they felt and what they thought in relation to past and current events they were relating. Therefore, the proposed structure was not religiously followed. Rather, in this case, reaching for flexibility and alternatives was sensible as it fostered the generation of new insights and understanding relevant to the research purpose (Huberman & Miles, 2002; Seidman, 2006). The third interview was meant

to discover the meaning of experience. Participants reflected on and offered their thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about stories previously shared. Making intellectual and emotional connections required the participants to consider their current experience in the specific context in which they occurred and thus required the foundation of the first two interviews.

Naturally, the interview guides that oriented the meetings with the students (Appendix E) addressed conditions and experiences relating to elementary and high school, university life, academic probation and companioning, as well as the meaning of the stories shared. The interviews took the form of individual, face-to-face, informal conversations. They were semi-structured, that is, I relied on interview guides but remained open to follow and probe in light of the accounts shared by the interviewee (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Each meeting lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and was mainly constituted by open-ended questions to help the participant reflect and reconstruct his or her story. One to 13 days separated each participant's interviews allowing for time to ponder over relevant stories to share within the interview context.

Alignment with the theoretical framework.

The procedure suggested by Seidman suits this study's theoretical framework. Firstly, Dewey's principle of continuity argues that each experience has an influence on future experiences and conversely, that every new experience is shaped by the effects of past experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997). The three-interview structure proposes that the first interview focuses on early experience, the second, on concrete details of present lived experience, and the third, on the meaning of the experience shared (Seidman, 2006). This process fosters the exploration of the past and how it led the participants to their current situation. It also encourages the participant to consider the significance of past and current

experience for the future. Thus, the data collected is in concordance with Dewey's theory of experience, particularly with the principle of continuity.

Secondly, the three-interview series' emphasis on the meaning of experience is also tied to the theoretical framework. As detailed earlier, contemplating raw primary experience gives it meaning and depth and it leads to an enriched and refined form of experience (Dewey, 1958). Seidman's (2006) structure specifically seeks to help the participant reflect on his experience and elucidate intellectual and emotional connections in regard to experience (Dewey, 1958). This process geared at meaning making also allows tapping into mental operations and how they affect the participant's experience.

Pilot study.

In preparation for the three-interview series, I conducted a pilot study with one student who had, in the past, experienced academic difficulty. Conducting a pilot study had important benefits, as recorded in my researcher journal. First, it allowed me to familiarize myself with Seidman's three-interview series and to test the interview guides and procedures. In the process, I noticed that I was overly enthusiastic and used self-disclosure too often. I concluded that I should aim for a more neutral stance to avoid emphasizing themes discussed. I also consulted previously read textbooks on interviewing (Ivey & Ivey, 2003; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Seidman, 2006) to get reacquainted with the preferred interview practices and to adjust my behaviour and attitude while interviewing. Second, as expressed in my researcher journal, conducting a pilot study enhanced my confidence in my ability to ask meaningful questions that trigger reflection and discussion with regard to past school experience and academic difficulties. As well, the journaling activity itself effectively allowed me to further reflect on the theme of study and uncover some biases regarding students on academic probation.

Secondary data sources.

To supplement Seidman's three-series interviews with students in academic probation I examined other sources. Specifically, I conducted one in-depth interview with the academic companion and one with the program developer. I also performed a document analysis, and I kept a researcher journal. These supplementary sources are detailed in the following pages.

Single in-depth interviews with professional resource personnel.

The single interviews with the key personnel involved in the implementation the ACP were semi-structured, individual face-to-face verbal interchanges (Fontana & Frey, 2005). First, I interviewed the academic companion who offered support to the five students participating in this study. In this interview (Appendix F), I investigated her perspective and philosophy on companioning. I also sought to understand how that translated into her practices and her work with probationary students. This interview lasted approximately 1 hour.

My incentive to interview the program developer was to better understand academic companioning from an administrative viewpoint. This interview (Appendix G) probed her goals and objectives in designing and implementing a support program for probationary students. This interview lasted 1 hour 20 minutes.

Document analysis.

To further investigate the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companioning, I included yet another source of data in this inquiry. A document analysis was used to delimit the ACP's objectives and conceptual foundation and how they related to the students' experience in the program (Holbrook, 1996). In this endeavour, texts including (a) the university support services' web page, (b) a research proposal describing the rationale behind the development

and implementation of the companioning program, (c) the program's logic model, and (d) a published article reporting on the effectiveness of the program were analyzed according to the research purpose (Piolat, 2002; Salminen, Lyytikäinen, & Tiitinen, 2000). Documents were carefully reviewed to uncover the posture of the ACP and the approach of the success service, wherein the program was developed.

Alignment with the theoretical framework.

The single in-depth interviews and the document analysis complement Seidman's three-interview structure and links with the theoretical framework. As previously mentioned Dewey's principle of interaction states that an experience is an interplay between the individual and his environment (1938/1997). On the one hand, the individual component of this interplay is tapped into through Seidman's emphasis on concrete details as well as intellectual and emotional connections. On the other hand, the data stemming from (a) the interviews with the academic companion, (b) the interview with the program developer, and (c) the document analysis yield an understanding of the other end of this interplay, the environment in which probationary students received support. In this way, the single in-depth interviews and the document analysis help situate the probationary students' experience in context and the meaning of such experiences (Seidman, 2006). Furthermore detailing the context is of prime interest in the study of human phenomena (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Polkinghorne, 1983). As explained earlier, in case study research, highlighting contextual conditions helps delimit human experience (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003).

Researcher journal.

Finally, through the research process, I also used a researcher journal. Baribeau (2004) inspired my journaling. She recommends keeping different types of notes for different purposes. Descriptive notes consisted of general observations regarding the study or

interviews, methodological notes kept track of the procedures or motives for modifying the expected course of action, and theoretical notes kept track of the development of research ideas or conceptualizations. I also included post-interview entries, containing reflections about my thoughts, impressions, biases, or concerns about the meeting allowed me to better contextualize the interview. I also included personal notes with regards to my own experience as a student, my victories and my struggles and how they influenced me. I treated this journal as a travel diary in which I kept consistent notes that were dated, categorized, and accessible.

This reflective journal was a valuable research tool in the investigation process. Firstly, it allowed me to observe words and statements that were recurring or accompanied by pauses or apparent discomfort. Rather than interrupting the flow of the interview I could note emphasis or hesitation in the participant, consider these in preparation for subsequent interviews, and revisit relevant areas in later meetings. Secondly, the journal helped monitor my thoughts in regards to the investigation. It gave me the opportunity to reflect and examine my visceral experience with my research topic and participants and to bring it into awareness, adding rigour to this study (Prégent, 2000). It was a valuable device to in which I examined my own uncertainties and tracked inconsistencies, hesitations or instances of sidetracking by the participants, to later discuss and debrief with my research advisor and fellow colleagues. The researcher journal was beneficial in that it enhanced the research process and helped monitor my own experience through the data collection. It represents an important component of the process. I consulted my notes on numerous occasions in the analysis phase and even traced provisional interpretations in it. However, I have not explicitly analyzed these notes.

Data analysis.

Qualitative case study analyses are interpretive (Creswell, 2012; Stake, 1995).

Authors believe this represents a strength in qualitative research (Brandell & Varkas, 2001; Merriam, 1988). The human investigator, owing to his conscience, intuition, and ability to reflect can interact with research participants to grasp their constructions or participate in the co-construction of meaning attributed to experiences (Rodwell, 1998; Stake, 2005). The following pages describe the interpretive analysis carried out in this study.

Interview transcriptions.

I transcribed verbatim all 18 in-depth interviews¹¹. As suggested by Seidman (2006), I noted the non-verbal elements such as pauses, laughs, hesitations, emphases, vernacular expressions, and pronunciation with a clear purpose in mind. Other than a desire to present the style of each participant, I concur with Blauner's (1987) belief that language should not be separated from the person. He argues that this disjointing is a fundamental error in research. Moreover, Blauner suggested that speech has a social significance. An individual's idiosyncrasies of speech echo his association to social groups and stripping a participant's speech from their particularities might be an implicit insult to their distinctiveness. Notably, the "translation" involved in the process of polishing a participant's language may be misleading (Coles, 1975). To make their own interpretations from a text, readers must have access to the words of the participants as they expressed them, as much as possible (Stakes, 1995). Therefore, I genuinely endeavoured to present the participants' voice as I heard it,

¹¹ Four students completed Seidman's three-series interviews and a fifth student accepted to take part in a fourth interview to share a full life story. In addition, the academic companion and the program developer also participated in one interview each, totaling 18 in-depth interviews.

hoping it would allow grasping the texture of their speech and add an additional layer of interpretation in the findings presented.

The speech of the francophone participating students is particularly interesting. Their Anglicism and sometimes incorrect sentence structures reflect the tensions some French minority groups in Canada bear at the junction of French and English communities. As worded by Blauner (1987), their vernacular language itself conveys the confusion and conflict experienced by French minority groups.

Seidman's structure for in-depth interviewing.

Once the interviews transcribed, the first phase of analysis proposed by Seidman (2006) is to reduce the data. In the process I followed Seidman's advice and sought to approach the data with an open mind and a desire to let the interviews speak for themselves. Plainly, I was committed to appreciate the emergent data. I kept detailed notes in my researcher journal on how I proceeded to reduce the text generated by the in-depth interviews.

The student interviews alone lent over 300 single spaced pages of transcripts. I performed two rounds of data reduction to achieve a manageable corpus with which I could work effectively. Through this process, I bore in mind the importance of preserving the logic, meaning, and sequence of the story as it was shared by the student. In the first round, I eliminated the segments that were superficial or irrelevant given the topic of the investigation. I removed my paraphrases when unnecessary to understand the student's response, my own disclosures, and discussion that served strictly as a transition to my next interview questions. After reducing every interview transcripts, I still felt that I needed to further reduce the data. I thus involved myself in a second reduction process that was more reflective to further purge excessive text. In this second round of reduction I was more

critical about what to retain. I removed anecdotes that were superficially presented and not revisited as well as the segments that were not aligned with the purpose of the inquiry. I was careful not to clean up the transcripts to preserve the student's voice as much as possible. Omissions were indicated by periods of ellipsis in parentheses (i.e., (...)). Each transcript version was kept for reference.

Interpreting and Sharing Storied Data.

Each life story has a unique value and worth and at the same time, life stories present common elements, motifs, and issues characteristic of human nature (Atkinson, 2002). To do justice to the uniqueness and commonalities of stories, Seidman (2006) proposes two forms of analysis, namely developing participant profiles in their own words and making thematic connections among their experience. Alike Seidman, other authors argue for similar complementary forms of analysis in case study research. Creswell (2012) suggests that in case studies where more than one case is examined, cross-case analysis typically follows within-case analysis. "When multiple cases are chosen, a typical format is to provide first a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, called a within-case analysis, followed by a thematic analysis across the cases, called a cross-case analysis" (Creswell, 2012, p. 101). Typically, the within-case analysis is a detailed study of the case involving descriptions that are essential to the generation of insights. This form of analysis helps the investigators manage large amounts of data as they become familiar with each case and story so they can in turn, focus on comparison across the cases (Eisenhardt, 2002). In this study, developing profiles and thematic connections was a productive and rewarding way to work with and present the shared data.

Profiles.

Stories, whether they are told to oneself or to others, are a fundamental type of data accounting for experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). It is the main form through which the meaningfulness of experience can be conveyed (Chase, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1988). As such, the participants' experience was examined through an analysis of narratives of their life stories. Seidman (2006) proposes that crafting a profile is an effective and meaningful way of understanding and presenting interview data. On the matter of the rationale for crafting profiles, he states:

A profile in the words of the participant is the research product that I think is most consistent with the process of interviewing. It allows us to present the participant in context, to clarify his or her intentions, and to convey a sense of process and time, all central components of qualitative analysis (Seidman, 2006, p. 118).

In this process I discerned segments that were significant to the story and organized passages to present stories that had a narrative logical thread (Riessman, 2008). This form of presentation, referred to as within-case analysis, allows the author to offer a detailed illustration of the participant in his context, history, and daily activities and establish themes within this case (Creswell, 2012). Interestingly, the profile also conveys a sense of process and time with regards to the participants' experience (Seidman). Presenting profiles is telling in the sense that it shows that while some issues may be common, it portrays that probationary students are not all the same (Humphrey, 2005-2006).

Each profile is co-constructed by the participant and the researcher. They are mainly composed of the student's words but crafted by the interviewer and researcher (Chase, 2005). Profiles are favoured as they "bring a participant alive" (Seidman, p. 120). These rich

accounts are pleasurable to read and offer insights into the participant's experience and theme under study.

After two rounds of data reduction, I set out to craft profiles. In a third reading of the accounts, I highlighted pertinent passages. By this point I was quite familiar with each one of the participant's story and I was able to discern segments that were significant for the student and relevant to the research purpose. Nonetheless, it was a process that required much reflection and concentration. In a fourth handling of the data, I organized passages in chronological sequence and by themes within this sequential arrangement. I was thus able to present stories that had a narrative logical thread, that mainly consisted of the participants' words, and that conveyed the different textures of the students' experience.

Thematic connections.

In addition, Seidman (2006) suggests making thematic connections across the cases, which he considers to be "a more conventional way of presenting and analysing interview data than crafting profiles" (p. 125). The students' stories were analyzed in view of Riessman's (2008) thematic narrative analysis, which focuses on the content of stories with the purpose of uncovering and thematically categorizing individuals' experience. This thematic analysis across cases uncovers similarities and differences between the cases (Creswell, 2012). By organizing interview segments into categories, the researcher can make connections between categories, group them into themes, and comment on excerpts thematically organized (Seidman). After creating student profiles, I began the process of cross-case thematic analysis based on the student interviews to discern the key themes in line with the purpose of the research.

Before starting the actual thematic analysis, I read the reduced version (second reduction) of the interview transcripts to consider the participant stories with a

comprehensive frame of mind. I imported the reduced transcripts into the Nvivo 8 software (QSR International, 2007) leaving out the superfluous details. Well acquainted with the students' stories, I established a coding scheme based on my knowledge of the interviews and the literature on academic probation. Using the Nvivo software, I selected and labeled excerpts that were interesting, eloquent, or recurring. In the process I refined the initial coding scheme, adding, merging, and renaming codes to adapt it to what was emerging from the interviews. Although I had a good grasp on the literature on academic probation, I remained mindful to appreciate the themes emerging from the students' stories and built a coding scheme from the "bottom-up", making the analysis process inductive as well as deductive (Creswell, 2012).

Single in-depth interviews with other informants.

In an effort to contextualize the participating students' stories, resource personnel interviews were also thematically analyzed. I started the process by reading both interviews to familiarize myself with the data. I then imported the interviews into the Nvivo software (QSR International, 2007) and integrated the data in the project containing the student transcripts. I coded meaningful and relevant passages in the same coding scheme.

Document analysis.

To further understand the context of the ACP, I performed a document analysis (Waller, 1999). Texts including (a) the university support services' web page, (b) a research proposal describing the rationale behind the development and implementation of the companioning program, (c) the program's logic model, and (d) a published article reporting on the effectiveness of the program were carefully reviewed. Following Piolat's (2002) advice, I examined the documents in two phases. Through a first reading I grasped the general idea of the documents. A second reading highlighted the relevant information to

further define the context in which the ACP was implemented by identifying and understanding the authors' objectives, intentions, posture, and values (Piolat, 2002).

Academic companion's case notes

Four of the five students participating in this study also took part in a previous study seeking to assess the ACP's effectiveness. Participants of this initial study accepted that the academic companion's case notes be used for analysis and this data was made available for the current analysis. I did not analyze the notes per se but used them to support the analysis of the interview transcripts. I reviewed the case notes for each individual student and confronted them to the stories shared with me in interview (Atkinson, 2002).

Researcher Preparation

Many past experiences prepared me for this study, particularly my academic background and research experience. I obtained a Baccalaureate of Arts (Honours) at the School of Psychology and completed a Masters of Arts at the School of Human Kinetics in the area of sports psychology. My Masters research was interested in individuals' unique experience and involved a 12-week individualized intervention with three adult athletes with multiple semi-structured, in-depth interviews as data collection strategy (Arcand, 2005). In this context I acquired a sound knowledge base on interviewing and developed interviewing skills through observation and practice. Furthermore, as part of a research assistantship, I participated in a previous study that sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the ACP. This assistantship helped familiarize myself with the objectives and procedures of the program. Finally, as previously mentioned, the pilot study as well as the reflective journaling I engaged in enhanced my readiness to conduct this study. It allowed me to adjust my behaviour and attitude, increase my self-confidence, recognize some biases and keep them in

check in the investigation. I felt well prepared to ask good questions inviting the participants' story (Chase, 2005).

Trustworthiness

Several procedures were followed to maximize the trustworthiness and authenticity of this study. First, there is transparency in this document, that is, the theoretical framework, purpose, and paradigm guiding this study are clearly stated and described (Creswell, 2007), my posture as inquirer is explicit (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), and my voice, background, and role as interpreter are acknowledged (Merriam, 2009). Second, context-rich and meaningful thick descriptions relating to the conditions and experience undergone by the participants were obtained through multiple in-depth interviews. This allowed me to share the intricacies of their stories (Patton, 2002). Third, detailed descriptions of the context, participants, and investigation strategy are provided and allow readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other contexts (Rodwell, 1998; Stake, 1995). Fourth, a pilot study was conducted to refine methods and procedures.

Finally, triangulation is often used as a key strategy to assess the internal consistency (Atkinson, 2002) and enhance the credibility of qualitative case studies (Karsenti & Demers, 2004; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2003). It aims for an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon by combining multiple methodological practices, data sources, or perspectives, which adds depth, breadth, rigour, complexity, and richness to an inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005b). I thus relied on varied procedures, sources, and informants to enhance the authenticity of the data. Data stemmed from (a) multiple semi-structured in-depth interviews with students, (b) a semi-structured in-depth interview with the academic companion, (c) a semi-structured in-depth interview with the program developer, (d) a document analysis, (e) a researcher journal, and (f) the academic companion's case notes. The convergence and divergence of

these various forms of data compelled me to further my reflections about the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship. This complementarity of data allows for interpretations that are all the more substantial and convincing (Karsenti & Demers, 2004; Yin, 2003).

Limits and Limitation

In evaluating the quality of this study on academic jeopardy, readers must consider its limits and delimitations. First, I studied a distinct sample. The students who participated in this study had been withdrawn from their respective program of study due to a CGPA below their university's requirements or too many failed credits but were granted the possibility to remain registered in their program of study with adequate academic support. In addition, the university attended by the participants represents a particular context. U of O is a bilingual institution attended by Francophone and Anglophone students. It promotes bilingualism and delivers programs, classes, and services in both official languages. Another distinctive characteristic of U of O is its rapid growth. The high increase of its student population is likely associated to a diversification of student abilities and needs to which the university must cater. Given the particular probationary status and the distinctive characteristics of U of O, the sample studied is not assuredly representative of other universities.

Finally, life stories guided by Seidman's (2006) protocol was the main form of data collection. By studying life stories this investigation was interested in what the participants judged meaningful and significant in their experience (Chase, 2005). Although I sought to elicit discussion on themes relevant to the purpose of the inquiry, through the interviews I collected the stories the participants chose to share. This study is thus largely based on the student's judgment and interpretations.

Chapter 5 : Findings

Revised Purpose

In view of the value of higher education and the number of students placed on academic probation each year, I undertook this study with the intent to examine the theme of academic probation. Specifically, I sought to investigate the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship. I was interested in the insiders' point of view of academic probation and therefore I engaged in a pursuit to investigate a twofold research question: What are the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship? And what do these conditions and experience mean to them?

As brought forth by Sparkes (2002), the research process, "behind the scenes of the 'cleaned up' methodological discussions" (p. 51), often comprises complexities, uncertainties, and surprises. This was the case in my research experience. I had set out to examine the conditions and experience with relation to academic probation. However, as I collected and analyzed data, I progressively recognized the importance of the companionship relationship in the students' experience. Therefore, an additional research question was added to further understand the probationary conditions and experience undergone by the participants: What are the characteristics of a fruitful companionship relationship in the context of academic probation?

Format of the Findings Chapter

I chose to report my research project in a manuscript format, that is, the findings section of this dissertation takes the form of five texts intended for publication in peer-reviewed journals. These manuscripts exploit different sources of data in attending to the two

forms of analysis put forth by Seidman, namely the creation of participant profiles and thematic connection. First, the meaningfulness of the students' experience is explored and portrayed through the crafting of participant profiles (Seidman, 2006). These descriptions are essential to the generation of insights and a logical step towards the creation of connections across cases, the second form of analysis (Creswell, 2012; Eisenhardt, 2002). These thematic connections are developed across the cases to uncover similarities and differences between stories (Seidman, 2006). Hence, the five manuscripts present different components of the emerging findings on the conditions and experience undergone by the participants.

This presentation harmonizes with the theoretical framework. In fact, Dewey's thought is organic and holistic (Garrison, 1996). Consequently, I considered the conditions and experience with academic probation as a unified whole by taking into account the students' journey through the school and the university systems, their placement on academic probation, as well as their course through the ACP in which they participated while on probation. In harmony with this holistic view on experience I created five texts that portray and address the components of the research purpose and the dimensions of the theoretical framework. A conceptual map (Appendix H) was developed to illustrate how the manuscripts relate the research purpose components to the dimensions of the theoretical framework into a web design (Peters, Chevrier, Leblanc, Fortin, & Malette, 2005). The numerous ramifications illustrate that the combination of the five texts allow for a comprehensive take on the conditions and experience relating to academic probation.

This chapter presents the manuscripts that were submitted or accepted for publication in scholarly journals. Naturally, each paper contains its own introduction, theoretical framework and methodology sections in accordance with its specific purpose. The findings of each text are presented and discussed in light of Dewey's theory of experience.

Manuscripts 1 and 2 relate to profiles and are presented after a brief definition of this first form of analysis proposed by Seidman (2006). Following this, I offer an outline of thematic connections, the second form of analysis suggested by Seidman, and present manuscripts 3, 4, and 5.

Profiles

The first and second texts are based on the first form of analysis Seidman (2006) proposes to share the respondents' stories in a meaningful way. These are crafted using the three-series interviews with the students as well as the academic companion's case notes and the researcher journal. A profile of each student was created in the analysis phase of this project and can be found in Appendices I to M. The profiles of Mark and Manelle were integrated in two manuscripts reporting qualitative case studies. They were chosen for their eloquence and the apparent reflection they had invested in their past and present experience as well as their meaning.

The first manuscript explores the story of Mark, an Anglophone undergraduate student on academic probation who participated in the ACP. His profile was presented and further discussed in light of Dewey's theory of experience. This text vividly illustrates a rich, complex and unique experience. Notably, it offers a provisional conceptualization of academic probation and calls for further definition of the notion. This first text is published in the *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*.

The second manuscript recounts the narrative of Manelle, a Francophone participant. Her story is discussed in light of the Deweyan theory of experience to further elucidate the nature of her experience in the academic context, specifically, its agreeable and disagreeable character. This paper, written in French, is published in the bilingual *Canadian Journal of Education*.

**Manuscript 1 – “When You Fail, You Feel Like a Failure” : One Student’s
Experience of Academic Probation and an Academic Support Program**

Abstract

This in-depth qualitative study explored the experience of one student on academic probation. It recounts the story of Mark, an undergraduate student on academic probation who participated in an academic support program to attain good academic standing. His story is contrasted to the current literature on academic probation and considered in light of Dewey’s (1958, 1938/1997, 1934/2005) theory of experience. This paper offers an important contribution to the literature on higher education by revealing a rich, complex and unique experience illustrating that Mark does not correspond to the typical image of probationary students depicted in the literature and thus breaking away from an oversimplified portrayal of probationary students. Importantly, this article also offers a provisional conceptualization of academic probation and calls for further definition of the notion.

Authors have indicated that students as well as institutions must be held accountable for student success (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Folger, Carter, & Chase, 2004; Tinto 1987, 2007). Correspondingly, most universities develop and implement remedial and probationary programs, reflecting an awareness of the role academic support plays in student success or failure (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Research is progressively emerging to understand the approach and format most efficient in promoting academic success. These generally focus on program evaluation, probationary students' characteristics, and obstacles leading to students being placed on probation. Few efforts are dedicated however, to exploring the lived experiences of students on academic probation, although this should not be overlooked (Vander Schee, 2007). Given this problem, the purpose of the current in-depth study was to examine the story of one probationary student and analyze it in view of a theory of experience (Dewey, 1958, 1938/1997, 1934/2005).

This article proposes a creative structure to improve its reading. It presents the literature on academic probation, then portray one probationary student's in-depth story, in the form of a profile. After this, it introduces Dewey's theory of experience and analyzes the case story in consideration of it.

Relevant Literature on Academic Probation

A plethora of literature exists on academic departure and drop out. However, there is much less work on the topic of academic probation. Interestingly, a distinction was established many years ago between students who voluntarily withdraw from their program of study and students who are dismissed (Grayson, 2003, Tinto, 1975; Vaughan, 1968). This distinction is interesting and warrants the need to attend to and conduct research with a specific population of students facing possible dismissal, although they do not wish to withdraw from their program of studies, that is, probationary students.

It is difficult to trace the origin and definition of academic probation. Authors usually use their university's academic regulations to explain conditions of academic probation, however, they do not formally define the notion. Scarf was among the first to use the term in an empirical study without explicitly outlining it (1957). Smith and Winterbottom later used the expression in a scientific article (1970). Although they did not formally define it, their text suggested that (a) students were put on academic probation when their grade performance was below a satisfactory threshold, (b) students on academic probation could remain in their program of study but must increase their grades, and (c) they would be dismissed if they did not. Aside from students not wishing to withdraw, we understand from these works that academic probation can be seen as a transition from unsatisfactory performance to either good academic standing or dismissal.

There is currently limited literature on academic probation. Research devoted to this specific topic is relatively new and sparse. It is also generally exploratory in orientation and, as yet, lacks depth and complexity. Furthermore, much of it relies on the body of literature on academic attrition. It follows that the notion of academic probation is currently insufficiently defined. Although early literature suggests elements of definition, these have yet to be explored, explained and authenticated to provide a solid foundation for emerging research on academic probation.

The literature on academic probation focuses on probationary students' characteristics. Authors typically indicate that they are underprepared for post-secondary education and lack features often related to academic success for instance, commitment, self-discipline, and knowledge of institutional or faculty culture and expectations. Their lack of essential tools such as study skills, time management, goal-setting, note taking, and anxiety

management are often stated as well (Humphrey, 2006; Hutson, 2006; Kamphoff, Hutson, Amundsen, & Atwood, 2007; Romainville & Noël, 1998; Tovar & Simon, 2006).

Investigations comparing students on academic probation to students in good standing indicated that those on academic probation had significantly lower high school grade point average, worked more, had children living with them more often, and expressed more obstacles to academic success than students in good standing (Holland, 2005; Isaak, Graves, & Mayers, 2007; Trombley, 2001). Interestingly, both groups reported similar academic skills problems although students in jeopardy scored significantly lower on a standardized assessment of study skills suggesting that they might not recognize the shortfalls of their study skills (Isaak et al., 2007).

The literature also enumerates several impediments leading to academic probation. These include personal problems, time constraints, and lack of motivation (Trombley, 2001) procrastination, poor time management, inefficient study strategies, disorganization, and poor concentration (Isaak et al., 2007), poor preparation, employment, personal illness, being a caregiver, mental health issues (i.e., depression, stress, anxiety, and attention deficit disorders; Holland, 2005), difficulty to balance school, work, and home-related responsibilities, problematic personal relationships, and lack of connectedness to campus life (Hutson, 2006). In view of this literature, which promotes an oversimplified image of probationary students by focusing on their common characteristics, Humphrey emphasized that they do not form a homogenous group (2006), highlighting the importance of studying probationary students on a case by case basis with the objective to understand individual experiences.

Literature also centers on programs implemented to assist probationary students. Seeing as there are no policies or guidelines mandating the development of probationary

programs (Lindsay, 2000) they vary greatly in terms of structure, format, and conceptual foundation (Hildreth, 2006; Humphrey, 2006; Kamphoff et al., 2007; Mann, Hunt, & Alford, 2004; Preuss & Switalski, 2008; Tovar & Simon, 2006). Literature on probationary programs offers a good step in the right direction by proposing new ways of assisting students.

However, calling for development in the area, Merisotis and Phipps (2000) noted that research on the effectiveness of remedial programs is scarce, underfunded, and inconclusive.

The literature and studies presented above is mainly descriptive and generally relies on quantitative methodologies, focusing on characteristics of probationary students, reasons for being placed on academic probation, and programs implemented to assist students on probation. Little research is dedicated to the lived experiences of students on academic probation although this should not be overlooked (Vander Schee, 2007). One qualitative investigation collected students' stories and sought to understand the complexity of their experience with and overcoming probation (Thomas, 2003) and offered a deeper look at the participants' stories. Effectively, qualitative studies have the potency to render rich portraits of struggling students and provide a thorough appreciation of the complexities of students' experience with academic probation. Accordingly, the current in-depth study examined the experience of one student on academic probation who participated in an academic support program.

The Story in Context

Given the above-mentioned issues and problems, the current study sought to delve into the condition and experience of academic probation. Specifically, it explored the experiences of one student on academic probation who participated in an academic support program in a large Canadian university. Each story is worthy and brings a unique color to the literature on academic probation. This paper focuses on the case of Mark (pseudonym). What

is particular about this specific case is the participant's openness in sharing his story as well as his ability to verbalize his experience and his readiness to explore its meaning. Such qualities allowed portraying the richness of Mark's story and creating an evocative life story profile.

To contextualize Mark's story, it is important to describe his university's conditions of academic probation and the academic support program in which he participated. The university where this study took place uses a 10-point grading scale. Students must maintain a minimum Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) of 3.5 on 10 in general bachelor's programs and 4.5 on 10 in the honors bachelor's program to be in good academic standing. As per the university's regulations on mandatory withdrawal, a student whose CGPA falls below these required minimums may remain registered in his program of study, but will be on academic probation until his CGPA reaches this requirement. If this condition is not met after two sessions or 24 course credits, the student will have to withdraw from his program. In addition to these grade specifications, withdrawal is mandatory at this university when a student fails 18 course credits or when he fails a compulsory course twice¹.

An academic support program was offered to students who had been withdrawn from their program of study for one of the reasons mentioned above. They were however, allowed to remain registered in their university provided they agreed to receive academic support. This opportunity represented a final chance to pursue their chosen program of study.

The support program favored a personalized structured approach and viewed the student holistically by considering his experiences in both academic and non-academic domains (Vander Schee, 2007). It offered support for one term by way of weekly one-on-one meetings with a professional resource person. It sought to facilitate the student's short and long term academic success by focusing on four broad dimensions of academic success

including (a) defining or refining academic and/or professional goals, (b) improving writing skills and understanding course content, (c) developing essential learning strategies, and (d) examining personal challenges (Philion, Bourassa, LeBlanc, Plouffe, & Arcand, 2010). Through a collaborative process, the student and the resource person worked together to understand the student's needs and develop a personalized and structured learning plan which was revisited periodically to better align the intervention. The student was also encouraged to take advantage of the existing support services offered on campus (e.g., academic writing help center, career services, student mentoring) as needed.

Constructing a Life Story Profile

Grounded in a social constructivist paradigm, this qualitative case study focused on meaning, which emerges through transactions with the environment and can be understood against the larger context wherein it took place (Fosnot & Perry, 2005; Shkedi, 2005), to explore the experiences of one student on academic probation. Specifically, the case is narrated from a life story perspective. Isabelle, the main investigator and first author, drew on multiple forms of data to create Mark's life story profile. The main source of data was qualitative interviews, specifically, Seidman's phenomenological approach to interviewing (2006) which allowed delving into Mark's lived experiences and the meaning he attributed to them (van Manen, 1997). Seidman proposes a three-series interview protocol in which a first interview seeks details of the participant's early experiences (e.g., regarding family, elementary and high school), a second focuses on details of the his current experiences with activities, social interactions and endeavors (e.g., in university), and finally, a third inquires on the meaning of experiences (e.g., thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about stories previously shared). Seeing as he shared detailed and rich stories, our discussions exceeded the three-interview protocol and Mark readily accepted to participate in a fourth interview. These took

the form of semi-structured individual, face-to-face, informal conversations that lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. One, three, and five days separated the four interviews.

Two additional sources of data were used, adding depth and rigor to the inquiry but were not explicitly analyzed. Firstly, Mark accepted that his resource person's notes through the academic support program be used in the construction of this profile. The first author thus reviewed and confronted the case notes to the stories shared (Atkinson, 2002). Secondly, a researcher journal including descriptive, methodological and theoretical notes on the inquiry process and post-interview entries was kept to monitor the lead investigator's thoughts and keep track of the research and interview processes (Baribeau, 2004; Prigent, 2000).

Qualitative case study analyses are interpretive (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). Mark's profile was created with the participant's narratives but crafted by the interviewer and main researcher (Chase, 2005). In this crafting process, the in-depth interviews were transcribed, keeping note of non-verbal elements such as pauses and emphases. Two rounds of data reduction were performed to achieve a manageable corpus, bearing in mind the importance of preserving the logic, meaning, and sequence of the story. Committed to appreciate the emergent data the main author approached it with a desire to let the interviews speak for themselves.

The life story profile is a form of within-case analysis that portrays the participant in his context, establishes themes within this case, and conveys a sense of process and time (Seidman, 2006). Creating the profile required much consideration. In this process segments that were recurrent or emphasized in the story were discerned and organized in chronological sequence and by themes to present stories that had a narrative logical thread (Riessman, 2008).

Mark's Life Story Profile

The findings are presented in the form of a profile, that is, an in-depth view of one student's life story and experience with academic probation (Seidman, 2006). Of particular value, this format allows recognizing the richness and complexity of the experience. The profile portrays the participant's story as Isabelle, the main investigator and lead author, heard it. Numerous quotes offer support to this analysis allowing readers to develop their own interpretations of the story (Stake, 1995, 2005).

Mark was a 22 year-old male student. He had been admitted as a probationary student in the General Bachelor program at the Faculty of Arts in September 2004. After the spring 2007 term, his CGPA was under the minimum required by his program and he was withdrawn from his program of study. However, he was given the opportunity to remain registered in his program provided he obtained assistance from an academic support program. In the fall 2007, he participated in an academic support program in his university. In the fall 2008, he responded to an email invitation for the current study and accepted to take part in it.

Notes in the researcher journal show that the discussions flowed well between Mark and Isabelle. Interview questions and probes triggered elaborate in-depth narratives, eloquently told. He shared many relevant factual details of experiences as well as the significance of events and incidents.

Family

Mark grew up with his mother and two older step sisters. His mother worked two jobs to make ends meet but instilled discipline and order in the family. An avid reader, she was articulate and encouraged her children to voice their opinion. Mark described his father as a wandering nomad, who only installed stability in his life after having a child. He was

fascinated by politics and literature, which seduced Mark's interests. His parents, as well as his maternal grandfather and his two older step sisters were important sources of support, for school and future endeavors.

Elementary School Years

Not challenged or interested in elementary school, Mark put little effort in his studies. Concurrently, although he always had to attend school, there was not, in his family, an emphasis on excelling academically. Football and other sports captivated and kept him busy every recess. Friendships in elementary school revolved around sports but Mark did not recall significant friends stating that his family moved numerous times as he was growing up. As a result he did not establish long lasting friendships and often felt like an outsider. Furthermore, he did not recall significant teachers.

High School Years

Due to insufficient grades, Mark had not been admitted to the high school of his choice. Rather, he attended a district high school, a "ghetto school" as he called it and he could not attend advanced classes, which unsettled him: "That has an effect on kids, I'm sure, the whole idea that you're not in the class with the smart people you know?" Concerned about his school friends and his plunging grades, his mother moved to a different neighborhood where he attended a better school and befriended serious students.

Mark had mixed experiences with high school teachers. While some encouraged him to pursue post-secondary studies, others did not challenge him. Disinterest and conflicted rapport with some teachers led him to put little effort in their classes. Nonetheless, he raised his grades as it was a condition to play in the varsity football team.

University Journey

Mark moved away from his family to pursue post-secondary studies. Early in the school year he was forced to vacate his residence room as he was accused of violating the housing service's code of conduct. This represented a major obstacle in his transition to university. He felt mistreated by the housing service and therefore by the university. As a result, he felt like he was not welcome and did not belong in university, making it difficult for him to get engaged in his studies.

I think that, because I felt that I was mistreated by the housing, that I felt that I was mistreated by the university (...) Yeah, so I think that really disenfranchised me and I felt I wasn't wanted here. (...) I didn't even want to come, you know, I thought that school wasted my time type thing (...) I was reading a lot o' the required readings for those classes I just wasn't going to the seminars, sometimes even to the tests.

Mark was interested enough in what he was learning to complete the required readings for his classes. However, he was disconnected from his university as an institution and he did not feel compelled to attend his classes.

After the residence incident, Mark moved in with newly met fellow students and found himself in a living arrangement that was not conducive to productive study habits. Other noteworthy relationships in university included a girlfriend who had a bipolar disorder and a good friend with whom he partied and focused on hobbies rather than studying. Peer pressure was an important challenge in the university setting.

Didn't feel like I belonged and it was that absolute, it was an overwhelming feeling that I needed to belong to something. And what I did belong to was this group o' people that liked to drink and do drugs, and we had a great time together, we had a

lota fun together but it just wasn't productive, I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing, you know?

Feeling detached and removed from his university he assumed a lifestyle that gave him a sense of belonging although, as he recognized, it was unfavorable to success in his studies.

Transition to university was further complicated by a family-related incident. When he was in his final high school year, his mother moved to a different city with her spouse, leaving Mark "behind". Unable to provide for himself, he moved in his older sister's living room. He felt upset and abandoned by his mother and had no contact with her for several months when he began university. Tension on the relationship was intensified in Mark's second year of studies when he learned his mother had considered an abortion when she was pregnant with him. In spite of these obstacles, the relationship eventually improved and recovered.

Experiencing multiple difficulties in his first and second years, Mark's academic life became a strain and eventually he struggled to carry on his student activities. "It was painful to be in class. I didn't want to be in class, I didn't want to be there at all." He endeavored to persist and pursue his studies although in many instances, this effort was a grueling experience.

In a few instances, he found that professors and classes were engaging. To enjoy and commit to learning, he needed to be challenged, to have some liberty in his assignments and to develop a relationship with his professors and classmates. Such conditions made it easier for him to devote the required effort and reap better grades.

Interviewer: So what does it mean to be engaged?

Uh, to have a relationship with the professor. If I like the professor and the professor takes the time to learn my name, I'm damn well gonna be handing in good papers.

There's no question about it. If he knows me and I know him and we've talked about things, yeah, I'm gonna do everything I can to do my best. Whereas if I don't know the professor, and there's 240 kids and it's a terrible class, you know, he doesn't know me I'm [a number] to him you know, I don't care.

Although Mark took responsibility for his difficulties and poor academic results, the quote above illustrates that, in some respect, he did not always benefit from relationships and an environment favorable to his motivation.

Mark's story so far highlights hurdles and barriers in the academic setting. However, through university, he also pursued a hobby with much enthusiasm, that of creative writing. At the time of the interviews he published articles for an online journal of Canadian politics and had an accumulated record of poems and screenplays. This evidently energized him and was in line with his purpose of pursuing a career in creative writing. He acknowledged however that, for the time being, concentrating too much energy on writing poems and scripts conflicted with his academic success. Although he derived positive energy from writing, he believed it diverted his engagement from his studies.

When he experienced difficulties, Mark did not seek help from his university support services. On the one hand, he lost faith in his university through the conflict with the housing services and would not turn to its services or personnel for support. On the other hand, he did not believe that he had academic related needs but rather that he ought to develop self-discipline and uncover a desire to study.

Withdrawal from his Program of Study

Mark had been admitted to university as an at-risk acceptance, his grades being below the minimum admission average of 70%. He was aware of the academic support services offered on campus as well as the requirement to reach and maintain a CGPA of at least 3.5

on 10 to remain in his program of study. After struggling in first and second year, he was withdrawn from his program as his grades were below the minimum CGPA required by the university. Participating in an academic support program and enhancing his grades had been offered to him as a condition to remain in his program of study. He welcomed the opportunity to obtain assistance nevertheless the anticipation of a possible failure had an effect on him.

(...) when you fail, you feel like a failure, right. And that is just a breeding ground for insecurity. You think that you can't achieve things, or what you set out to do. Especially in university where it seems like everybody else is doing well, you know? (...) But if you are failing, you think I'm one of the people that can't cut it, you know, I'm not fit to be here.

The quote above indicates that pending failure had an effect on his beliefs in his capacities to be successful in university. Regardless, he used the situation in a constructive manner reminding himself of the repercussions he could suffer if he allowed complacency in his life. Mark illustrated this important realization in these terms.

I have failed before, I have let complacency slip in before and I have seen what happens when I do allow myself to walk on the beaten path, you know? That I have experienced failure in my academic life when I didn't apply myself is constant reminder that if I don't apply myself, I will fail.

Coupled with the emotional toll of anticipated failure, Mark recounted experiences that were pivotal in his process of developing self-discipline and uncovering a desire for his studies. Notably, two friends recognized his potential and separately encouraged him to apply himself in his studies telling him he had what it took to be successful. "Four months of these two constantly telling me that I can do this, and I got great marks that semester."

These discussions with two friends helped him regain confidence in his capacity to be do well in university and understand the importance of investing effort in his studies.

Another key experience concerned the observation of the fate of some family members who, in his view, were trapped in a “lower middle class” status with no chance of improvement. This ignited in him a strong motivation to complete a bachelor degree and reach his potential of becoming a writer. He described a meaningful conversation with an uncle whom he considered a role model. “And he just said ‘You know, you’re up here and you’re working really hard. (...) When you go back to school, remember what you’ve left. That’s [studying] your new work (...) you have to treat it like work.’ ” This helped him understand the magnitude of the opportunity he was giving himself by completing postsecondary studies. He knew it required substantial effort and he was willing to exert it.

Putting this realization into action, Mark changed his living situation to remove himself from a context fueling his habits of partying and his focus on creative writing. He ended his friendships altogether with one roommate rationalizing that they were great friends but negative influences on each other. He remained friends with another roommate who, like Mark, changed his lifestyle to concentrate on school.

I moved back in with new roommates. They’re both 28. (...) They’re very grounded guys, you know. They’re starting their careers and that’s a great atmosphere for me. (...) Because my big problem was peer pressure, right. (...) not having roommates there who fuel my desire to party. It’s best for me to be alone.

Although it was not easy, Mark was proactive in implementing changes in his life allowing him to shift his attention and energies to his student responsibilities.

Participation in an Academic Support Program

Mark's participation in an academic support program was compulsory to remain in university but he gladly committed to it. He was in the right state of mind, having made changes in his social and living environment and having acquired the confidence that he could be successful in university. The program helped him implement structure in his academic life and put in the work, which was vital to his academic success. With regards to benefits from the program, he felt that the reflection involved in the process was very useful.

When you sit down every week and write down how your week was, you really do see kinda the mental stability you get from doing well. I think that's something that a lot o' people don't realize is that when you start doing well in school, you become more stable. You really do. (...) So, when I reflected and saw 'Yeah, I wrote two tests this week and I studied for ten hours.' (...) And it's like 'Man, it was a little more work but I felt a lot better at the end of the week!' So I'm gonna keep doing that, you know?

This indicates that Mark's reflections through the program allowed him to feel better about his study habits and to solidify his determination to apply himself in university and successfully complete his studies.

Through the support program, having a professional resource person supporting him, monitoring his progress, and caring about his success further ignited his desire to thrive. Her encouragement and the faith she had in him gave him hope. Furthermore, Mark felt that his resource person was, without a question, very knowledgeable but he emphasized that she was a warm and caring person and that he appreciated her presence. Their connection was fundamental in his recovery process in the program.

I think that program really depends on the person who is interviewing you (...)

Although it takes a long time to trust somebody, you know, she's just a great person.

You feel comfortable with her the second you meet her. We had very compatible personalities.

Interviewer: So compatibility is important ...

Oh! Absolutely. I think it's probably the most important thing in the program, is the compatibility between the advisor and the student. Probably number one.

The relational dimension of the support program was apparently essential in Mark's experience. The competence and personality of his professional resource person was crucial to his progression through the academic support program, as well as his capacity to be at ease and to trust her. This kindled his motivation and engagement for his studies and academic project, as eloquently shared in the next passage.

The second I met [professional resource person], she's great, I wanted to do it, I had no problem with being in that program. And I felt, I don't know, it made me want to do well, you know (...) You want to do better when you know people are watching. And when you know that they have expectations for you, and especially when you know you can do it, you know?

Summary of Mark's Story

Mark faced multiple challenges in university such as eviction from the university residence, a living arrangement not favorable to academic activities, conflicts with his mother, and a lack of focus on his student responsibilities. Through these experiences, it became painful for Mark to be in class. He did shared that he enjoyed certain classes, particularly when he could develop a relationship with his professor and classmates and

when he was challenged. However, he gave little emphasis or detail to the positive experience throughout his university journey. When he faced academic difficulties he did not seek help from academic support services. The notice of withdrawal from his program of studies took an important toll on him and affected his confidence. Notable experiences, such as discussions with friends and with an uncle as well the realization that postsecondary studies represented meaningful opportunity helped him implement changes in his life to prioritize his studies.

Reportedly, a noteworthy benefit from the academic support program was tied to its reflective component. By critically observing his activities Mark eventually acknowledged that putting in the work led to progress and to feeling better about himself and his studies. In addition, he strongly believed that his resource person played a crucial role in his recovery process. Her personality, presence, and knowledge were essential to the trust he vested in her and the rapport they developed.

While participating in the support program, in the fall term of 2007, he successfully completed four classes and was allowed to continue studying in his program, keeping his probationary status. He followed five classes in the winter 2008 term, and at the time of the interviews was in his final semester expecting to graduate. He intended to pursue studies in creative writing after completing his bachelor degree.

The story of Mark indicates that he lacked some of the features associated to academic success, principally, self-discipline and commitment and that he encountered some of the impediments highlighted in the literature as obstacles to academic success, such as procrastination, lack of motivation, problematic personal relationships and lack of connectedness to campus life (Hutson, 2006; Isaak et al., 2007; Trombley, 2001). However, there is little evidence in his story that he lacked the essential tools (e.g., anxiety

management, time management, goal-setting, study habits, note taking) usually associated to academic probation in recent studies (Humphrey, 2006; Hutson, 2006; Kamphoff et al., 2007; Romainville & Noël, 1998; Tovar & Simon, 2006).

Mark's Story in Light of Dewey's Theory of Experience

The life story profile illustrates the richness and complexity of Mark's unique experience with academic probation. It allows the reader to take into account the context and conveys a sense of process and time (Creswell, 2007; Seidman, 2006). Although he shared some common characteristics presented in the literature, the in-depth examination of Mark's story shows that he does not correspond to the typical portrayal of probationary students as depicted in the reviewed literature (Humphrey, 2006).

To move away from a simplified portrayal of probationary students and to add depth to the exploration of academic experience, this article further examines Mark's story in light of Dewey's theory of experience (1958, 1938/1997, 1934/2005). To grasp Dewey's theory, we must first consider what he meant by the term experience. For him, what consists an experience "includes *what* men do and suffer, *what* they strive for, love, believe, and endure, and also *how* men act and are acted upon, the ways in which they do and suffer, desire and enjoy, see, believe, imagine" (Dewey, 1958, p. 8). In short, everything a person acts upon and undergoes constitutes an experience. It includes all that has meaning for the person, and evokes emotions and attitudes. In this way, experience influences the individual's mindset both intellectually and emotionally. Dewey suggested that this influence is a function of the quality of the experience, which is based on two principles, interaction and continuity (1938/1997).

The principle of interaction is based on the idea that the person is in undivided unity with their environment and derives meaning from each experience as they interact with their

social and physical settings (Dewey, 1958, 1938/1997, 1934/2005). Some transactions have the potential to hinder further learning by producing a lack of sensitivity or responsiveness and by promoting boredom, inactivity, or a careless attitude. Such experiences are labeled mis-educative as they restrict the possibilities of having rich future experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997). For instance, problematic transactions lent by the residence incident left Mark feeling mistreated and ensued a loss of faith and a disconnect with his university. Such experiences precipitated negative internal conditions, which seemingly diminished his readiness and receptivity to new learning experiences in the university context. In fact, Mark expressed his boredom and careless attitude when he said, “I just wasn’t going to the seminars, sometimes even to the tests. You know, at that point I didn’t care at all about the grades.”

Transactions with the environment also have educative potential as they foster positive internal conditions and are believed to promote receptivity to further experiences and growth (Dewey, 1933/1997, 1938/1997). For example, the academic support program’s reflective component allowed Mark to recognize the benefits of focusing and dedicating more time and energy to his studies. As a result, he felt better about his studies and more determined to successfully complete his bachelor degree. In addition, the nature of his rapport with the resource person was key in his experience through the program (Arcand & Leblanc, 2011; Arcand, 2012). Such transactions were pleasant, reassuring, and fostered positive internal conditions conducive to growth. Indeed, Mark expressed his receptivity to learning when he said “ ‘It was a little more work but I felt a lot better at the end of the week!’ So I’m gonna keep doing that you know?” This anecdote, among others, suggests that his participation in the support program fostered the generation of new ways of dealing with

his environment. Through the support process, he underwent new kinds of experiences that were less distressing and helped alter the nature of his experience with university.

The second principle of Dewey's theory of experience, the principle of continuity suggests that experience is cumulative, each experience having an influence on future experiences and conversely, every new experience being shaped by past experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997). Experiences influence the construction of intellectual and emotional attitudes altering the individual's perception of and rapport with his environment (Dewey, 1958). Mark's story highlights some pivotal experiences and their consequence on further experiences. Encouragements from two friends as well as a meaningful conversation with an uncle "When you go back to school remember what you've left" helped him develop the attitude and create the conditions to manage future situations productively. He implemented changes in his life with regards to his living situation and friendships with the purpose to focus on his studies. With the right state of mind, and eventually with the support of a professional resource person, Mark became proactive in re-creating the social conditions that suited his needs in the university context. These events illustrate how Mark's choices and actions were shaped by past experiences and linked to a purpose and to future experiences enhancing growth.

The life story profile illustrates that each transaction and experience with the environment shape the individual and further experiences with the environment. In other words, knowledge, skills and learned attitudes help understand and manage future situations. In the education context, it is proposed that the physical and social environment should be organized to suit the student's needs and capacities ensuring growth-promoting experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997), a prime issue in the context of academic probation whereby students struggle to succeed in university.

An analysis of a probationary student's story in light of a theory of experience allows showcasing the complexity and richness of a student's experience with academic probation. For instance the profile portrays not only the struggles Mark encountered but also the importance that completing a bachelor degree had for him, his need to feel like he belonged in university, and his determination and dedication to recover good academic standing. This story, with its details, nuance, and depth of lived experience does not conflict with the current literature but distinguishes itself from the typical image of probationary students usually portrayed.

Limits

Some limitations must be considered in this report of Mark's life story profile. Firstly, single case studies are usually not considered a strong basis for generalization to others as the emphasis is to understand the case itself in its uniqueness. Indeed, the object of case study research is particularization, not generalization (Stake, 1995). In addition, this investigation guided by Seidman's (2006) procedure was interested in what the participant judged meaningful in their experience. It thus relies on the participant's judgment and interpretations (Chase, 2005).

Significance

In consideration of the current literature on academic probation which is mainly descriptive and positivist, recent works suggest a shift towards the uniqueness of experiences of students on academic probation (Humphrey, 2006; Thomas, 2003; Vander Schee, 2007). This paper thus presented Mark's life story, contrasted it to the current literature on academic probation, and considered it in light of Dewey's (1958, 1938/1997, 1934/2005) theory of experience. It makes a timely contribution to the research by delving deeper into the personal experience of a student on academic probation, as promoted by recent literature. Mark's life

story profile reveals a rich, complex and unique experience and indicates that he does not correspond to the oversimplified image of probationary students depicted in the reviewed literature (Humphrey, 2006). Going beyond characteristics and difficulties, it portrays the events, interactions and thoughts that had meaning for him, as well as emotions and attitudes they evoked in him (Dewey, 1958). This contributes to a better appreciation of the notion and reality of academic probation and helps move towards a comprehensive understanding of the experience and conditions of academic probation.

This paper makes another notable contribution to the literature on higher education by offering a provisional conceptualization of academic probation. Although the practice of academic probation is not new, it has not yet been formally defined in the literature. The current manuscript proposed elements of definition of academic probation, which suggests that it is a transition status. Specifically, students are placed on academic probation when their grades are below a satisfactory threshold, they can remain in their program of study but must increase their grades otherwise, they will be dismissed. Although it is a step in the right direction, this provisional conceptualization must be further explained, explored and authenticated to support future research on academic probation.

Notes

¹The reference used to present academic regulations of the university where this study took place was omitted in order to preserve Mark's anonymity.

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Texte 2 – L’expérience de la probation académique ou « C’tu juste moi qui est pas capable au niveau universitaire? » : Une étude de cas

Résumé

Cette étude qualitative s’intéresse à la probation académique. Elle relate l’histoire de Manelle, une étudiante en probation académique ayant participé à un programme d’accompagnement scolaire en vue d’améliorer son rendement. Présenté sous forme de profil, son témoignage est étudié à la lumière de la théorie de l’expérience de Dewey. En dévoilant une expérience riche, complexe et unique, le présent texte contribue à dépasser les idées communes attribuées aux étudiants en probation académique souvent dépeints comme ne possédant pas les compétences et dispositions nécessaires pour poursuivre des études universitaires.

Mots clés : Probation académique, théorie de l’expérience de Dewey, profil, étude de cas

Introduction

La plupart des universités développent et mettent en œuvre des programmes de soutien et de probation. En effet, les institutions universitaires semblent conscientes du rôle qu'elles jouent dans la réussite ou l'échec des étudiants (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). En parallèle, une abondance d'études sont dédiées à la réussite scolaire et on voit émerger un intérêt en recherche pour le phénomène de la probation académique. Toutefois, peu de recherches se sont intéressées à l'expérience vécue d'étudiants en probation, bien que l'importance de cette dimension soit soulignée (Vander Schee, 2007). Ainsi, la présente étude qualitative a pour objectif de mieux comprendre l'expérience d'une étudiante qui fut placée en probation académique. Dans le cadre de cet article et en harmonie avec les écrits de Dewey (1938/1997, 1934/2005) et de Seidman (2006), l'expérience de l'étudiante en probation académique inclut et comprend son parcours scolaire et universitaire, sa mise en probation, de même que son cheminement au sein du programme d'accompagnement.

Afin de mieux comprendre l'expérience de cette étudiante en probation, nous analyserons les écrits sur la probation académique et présenterons la théorie de l'expérience de Dewey avant de décrire la méthodologie utilisée lors de cette étude et le contexte de recherche dans lequel elle s'est déroulée. Une description complète du profil de la participante nous permettra ensuite de le discuter à la lumière de la théorie deweyenne de l'expérience.

Probation académique

La notion de probation académique est peu discutée et peu circonscrite dans la littérature. Les auteurs s'appuient généralement sur les règlements scolaires de leur institution pour expliquer les conditions de probation sans définir formellement le terme. Ceci dit, on retrouve un texte de Smith et Winterbottom, publié en 1970, qui suggère que a)

les étudiants sont placés en probation académique lorsque leurs notes sont sous le seuil exigé, b) ils peuvent toutefois poursuivre leur programme d'études à condition d'améliorer leur rendement scolaire, et c) à défaut d'améliorer leur moyenne scolaire, ils seront contraints de se retirer de leur programme d'études. Ce texte porte à croire que la probation académique peut être considérée comme un temps de transition, à savoir un moment où la performance scolaire se situe sous le minimum requis à un rendement académique satisfaisant ou, dans le cas contraire, à un retrait obligatoire.

Le thème de la probation académique fait présentement une percée dans la littérature scientifique, quoique les études soient encore peu nombreuses et portent plutôt sur des généralités du phénomène. Plusieurs s'intéressent aux caractéristiques des étudiants en probation et font valoir qu'ils ne sont pas disposés à poursuivre des études de premier cycle. On indique qu'ils ne possèdent pas les dispositions favorisant la réussite académique, telles que l'autodiscipline et une connaissance de la culture universitaire ou des exigences facultaires et institutionnelles (Humphrey, 2005-2006; Tovar & Simon, 2006). Certaines études portent sur les aptitudes et conditions typiquement associées à la réussite et mentionnent plusieurs entraves associées à la mise en probation académique tels que les problèmes personnels, les contraintes de temps, le manque de motivation (Trombley, 2000-2001), la procrastination, une mauvaise gestion du temps, des stratégies d'étude inefficaces, le manque d'organisation et une faible concentration (Isaak, Graves, & Myers, 2006-2007). D'autres obstacles sont rapportés en lien avec la probation académique, dont une préparation inadéquate aux études postsecondaires, le fait d'occuper un emploi accaparant, la maladie, le fait d'avoir une ou des personnes à sa charge, des problèmes de santé mentale (Holland, 2005), la difficulté à concilier les études, le travail et les responsabilités domestiques, des

relations interpersonnelles problématiques et un sentiment de dissonance avec le contexte universitaire (Hutson, 2006).

De même, de nombreuses études sur la probation académique analysent les initiatives mises en œuvre pour soutenir la réussite d'étudiants en probation académique. Une analyse systématique de la littérature sur le thème révèle que de nombreuses études sur les programmes de soutien scolaire sont « suspectes » (p. 214) sur le plan méthodologique en raison d'une ambiguïté liée à des faiblesses de designs et de rapports recherche (Valentine et al., 2011). Par conséquent, elles n'offrent pas de base solide en guise de politique ou lignes directrices guidant la mise sur pied des programmes de probation (Lindsay, 2000; Valentine et al., 2011). Ainsi, les programmes varient grandement en termes de structure, d'organisation et de fondement conceptuel. Certains programmes favorisent des ateliers de groupe (Hildreth, 2006; Humphrey, 2005-2006; Shao, Hufnagel, & Karp, 2009-2010), d'autres proposent une approche de soutien individuel (Mann, Hunt, & Alford, 2003-2004; Preuss & Switalski, 2008; Schwebel, Walburn, Jacobsen, Jerrolds, & Klyce, 2008) et d'autres encore adoptent une combinaison de ces deux modes (Kamphoff, Hutson, Amundsen, & Atwood, 2006-2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006). Les programmes se distinguent aussi en ce qui a trait à l'objet d'intervention. Certaines initiatives misent sur l'apprentissage d'habiletés académiques et d'habitudes de travail (Hildreth, 2006; Humphrey, 2005-2006; Shao et al., 2009-2010) alors que d'autres offrent simultanément un soutien d'ordre personnel (Kamphoff et al., 2006-2007; Preuss & Switalski, 2008). Finalement, la durée des programmes varie d'une session unique de deux heures (Hildreth, 2006) à un engagement sur toute une session académique (Mann et al., 2003-2004).

Ainsi, les études recensées présentent des modalités de soutien mises en place et énumèrent une constellation de facteurs qui caractérisent les étudiants ayant le statut de

probation académique. Dans la littérature actuelle, les raisons menant à la probation sont formulées comme étant des éléments communs aux étudiants en probation portant le doctorat à inférer que les étudiants en probation académique partagent des caractéristiques et des situations peu propices à la réussite. Inquiet de ce constat, Humphrey (2005-2006) rappelle que ces étudiants ne sont pas tous les mêmes et souligne l'importance d'examiner la probation académique au cas par cas afin de mieux comprendre le phénomène.

En parallèle, il est intéressant de consulter la documentation issue du domaine de la pratique. La perspective professionnelle traduit de manière évidente le désarroi vécu par les étudiants en probation. Une doyenne d'études de premier cycle, par exemple, rapporte le désespoir et la honte qui paralysent les étudiants en probation qu'elle rencontre dans son rôle professionnel (Glasser, 2009). Dans un document de réflexion, Zuzelo (2000) attire l'attention sur la vulnérabilité des étudiants en probation face à l'humiliation, la peur et l'anxiété. De même, Nance (2007) rédige un document portant sur l'impact psychologique de la probation académique et y souligne son effet dévastateur sur l'estime de soi et le bien-être. En somme, cette documentation suggère que les praticiens s'intéressent à une dimension intime de l'expérience de la probation académique. Dans le cadre de la recherche, bien que quelques auteurs (Cruise, 2002; Ryan & Glenn, 2002-2003) évoquent les sentiments négatifs associés à la probation, leurs textes n'élaborent pas sur la signification, l'influence ou l'effet de cette expérience. Ce constat réclame une considération particulière et motive notre intérêt à mieux comprendre l'expérience d'étudiants en probation académique en portant une attention à la dimension intime de cette expérience et à la perspectiveémique, c'est-à-dire au sens que donnent les acteurs concernés au phénomène étudié (Faugère et al., 2010).

L'expérience selon Dewey

Pour comprendre l'expérience vécue des étudiants en probation académique, nous avons fait appel à la théorie de l'expérience de Dewey (1938/1997, 1934/2005). Celle-ci présente une perspective pédagogique de l'expérience qui considère l'individu comme un acteur dans son contexte environnemental et suggère que ce dernier « apprend » de son expérience et s'ajuste en conséquence dans ses projets subséquents. De par son intérêt à la signification que l'individu donne à l'expérience, la théorie de Dewey fournit une perspective permettant d'accéder au cœur de cette expérience.

Les principes d'interaction et de continuité sont fondamentaux à cette théorie (Dewey, 1938/1997). Le principe d'interaction postule que l'être humain transige invariablement avec son environnement puisqu'il est partie intégrante d'un monde physique et social. L'expérience est ce qu'elle est en raison de transactions continues entre l'individu et son environnement dans des modes d'échanges socialement et culturellement construits (Dewey, 1938/1997, 1958). Le principe de continuité propose que cette interaction entre l'individu et son environnement est continue, c'est-à-dire que toute expérience humaine s'additionne à un vécu préalable et est interprétée selon les expériences antérieures. Ainsi, toute expérience change l'individu en motivant chez lui un apprentissage qui modifie son interprétation d'expériences subséquentes (Dewey, 1938/1997). Ces deux principes représentent deux aspects de l'expérience qui se chevauchent. Les expériences, prenant place dans un environnement donné, se succèdent et influencent la lecture de situations subséquentes ainsi que l'interprétation du monde et de l'environnement (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Dewey propose également que l'expérience se définit par son caractère agréable ou désagréable, et par le fait qu'elle soit désirée ou non. Ces qualités de l'expérience sont déterminantes puisqu'elles façonnent l'individu (Dewey, 1938/1997). Suivant les principes d'interaction et de continuité, ce sont ces qualités (dés)agréable et (in)désirable de l'expérience qui influencent les goûts et les préférences de l'individu en configurant ses attitudes à l'égard d'expériences vécues (Dewey, 1938/1997, 1934/2005). Logiquement, l'individu aura tendance à rejouer les activités et événements plaisants et à l'opposé, éviter les situations déplaisantes. Ainsi, l'expérience change la façon dont l'individu se représente son environnement et sa façon d'entrer en relation avec celui-ci (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

L'expérience est considérée éducative lorsqu'elle stimule l'ouverture à la nouveauté et engendre des conditions permettant à l'individu de grandir au niveau physique, intellectuel ou moral (Dewey, 1938/1997). Les activités procurant une expérience positive caractérisée par le plaisir, l'expression de soi, la motivation intrinsèque et l'effort intentionnel représentent des occasions de développement positif. L'expérience est considérée désavantageuse ou « mis-éducative » (Dewey, 1938/1997, p. 13) lorsqu'elle restreint la sensibilité à l'expérience et génère l'ennui, l'inactivité ou l'insouciance.

La signification de l'expérience repose sur la conscience et la réflexion de l'individu, plus précisément sur l'interprétation qu'il tire de son expérience (Dewey, 1934/2005). Cette perception implique non seulement l'attention de l'individu mais également une « reconstruction » (p. 42) de la conscience en fonction de la qualité agréable ou désagréable de l'expérience et selon qu'elle soit désirée ou non. En effet, même les épreuves et les conflits peuvent être appréciés par l'individu pour leur valeur dans un processus de

développement (Dewey, 1934/2005). Tout dépend de la signification que l'individu attribue à l'expérience.

L'interprétation de l'expérience altère l'ouverture et tend à restreindre ou élargir le champ d'expérience de l'individu et conséquemment, sa croissance (Dewey, 1938/1997). La signification attribuée à l'expérience moule l'attitude de l'individu face aux situations futures et influence donc son intérêt à s'engager ou non dans certaines activités (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938/1997).

Méthodologie

Cette étude a pour but de mieux comprendre l'expérience d'une étudiante en probation académique en portant une attention particulière à la dimension intime de cette expérience et à une perspective émique. Elle présente le cas de Manelle (pseudonyme), une étudiante de premier cycle universitaire en probation académique. En ma qualité de chercheure et d'auteure principale, j'expose ma voix dans cette section méthodologique sur le processus de recherche que j'ai mis en œuvre. Je cherche ainsi à rendre transparente ma proximité avec les données et le processus de recherche et à reconnaître que ce texte ne repose pas sur une analyse neutre et détachée; il s'agit plutôt d'une construction basée sur le témoignage que la participante a partagé avec moi (Chase, 2005; Sparkes, 2002).

L'étude de cas qualitative vise à comprendre un phénomène en profondeur et de façon holistique (Karsenti & Demers, 2004; Stake, 2005), en plus de reconnaître la valeur de l'unicité des expériences personnelles et la signification attribuée à celles-ci (Stake, 2005; van Manen, 1997). À cette fin, l'histoire de Manelle fut rédigée sous forme de profil (Seidman, 2006). L'étude narrative s'intéresse à l'expérience des individus et la représentation qu'ils se font de leur monde (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). L'histoire, qu'on se la raconte à soi-même ou à un autre, est le creuset permettant de rendre compte de

l'expérience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). C'est par son entremise que sa signification peut être véhiculée (Polkinghorne, 1988). Ainsi, dans la présente étude, j'ai examiné l'expérience de la participante par le biais d'une analyse du témoignage qu'elle a partagée en entrevue. Plus précisément, j'ai utilisé l'analyse tridimensionnelle proposée par Clandinin et Connelly (2000). Cette analyse est inspirée de la théorie de l'expérience de Dewey (1938/1997, 1958) et est axée sur l'interaction, la continuité et le contexte de l'expérience.

Le profil est une façon enrichissante de présenter une perspective du phénomène étudié tout en racontant l'expérience de vie du participant. Celui-ci, construit par le chercheur et prenant appui sur les propos du répondant, fait valoir la complexité du thème à l'étude de manière crédible. De plus, la création d'un profil permet de rendre compte du contexte, du temps et de la notion de processus (Seidman, 2006). Dans le développement de ce profil, j'ai recueilli divers types de données. La principale source de données provenait d'entrevues qualitatives, menées selon une approche phénoménologique (Seidman, 2006) qui m'a permis de recueillir des informations sur l'expérience de Manelle et la signification qu'elle lui donnait (van Manen, 1997). Seidman (2006) propose un protocole d'entrevue à trois volets. Une première entrevue cherche à obtenir des détails sur l'expérience de vie passée du répondant (p. ex., sur sa famille et ses années à l'école élémentaire et secondaire). Une deuxième se penche sur les détails relatifs à ses activités, à ses interactions sociales et à ses projets actuels (p. ex., ses études universitaires). Enfin, une troisième entrevue vise à faire réfléchir le participant sur la signification de l'expérience (p. ex., ses pensées, ses croyances et ses sentiments relatifs au témoignage partagé lors de l'entrevue). Manelle a donc partagé une histoire détaillée et riche par l'entremise d'entrevues qui ont pris la forme d'entretiens semi-structurés d'une durée de 60 à 90 minutes chacun.

Deux sources de données additionnelles ajoutent rigueur et profondeur au profil de la participante. D'abord, Manelle a accepté que les notes de son accompagnatrice du programme d'appui universitaire (décrit plus loin) soient utilisées dans l'élaboration de son profil. J'ai ainsi revu ces notes et les ai comparées au témoignage de l'étudiante ce qui a permis de clarifier certains détails concernant son témoignage (Atkinson, 2002). De plus, j'ai tenu un journal de bord de chercheure qui me permettait de prendre conscience de mes observations et de les noter, ainsi que de rapporter la progression de l'étude. Ce journal était composé de notes descriptives, méthodologiques et théoriques sur le processus de recherche et a permis de faire état de l'esprit dans lequel se déroulaient mes rencontres avec Manelle (Baribeau, 2004; Prégent, 2000).

Cette analyse de cas qualitative est de nature interprétative (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995). Dans la création du profil, j'ai transcrit textuellement les entrevues en profondeur, en prenant note des éléments non-verbaux comme les pauses, rires et intonations (Seidman, 2006). J'ai réduit les verbatims à deux reprises afin de ne conserver qu'un corpus gérable de données. Par souci de présenter une histoire dont le fil narratif est logique (Riessman, 2008), j'ai cerné les tranches de l'histoire qui formaient l'essence du témoignage de la participante et les ai organisées par thème et en ordre chronologique. Je cherchais ainsi à laisser les entrevues parler d'elles-mêmes et à laisser les données émergentes se dégager (Frank, 2010).

Le contexte de l'étude

Pour comprendre l'expérience de Manelle, nous devons nécessairement considérer son contexte (Seidman, 2006). Il importe donc de décrire les règlements de son université relativement à la probation académique ainsi que le programme d'appui auquel elle a pris part alors qu'elle était en probation académique. L'université où s'est déroulée cette étude

exige que les étudiants, pour demeurer en règle, maintiennent une moyenne pondérée cumulative (MPC) minimum de 3,5 sur 10 au programme de baccalauréat général et de 4,5 sur 10 au programme de baccalauréat spécialisé. Tel que stipulé dans les règlements de l'université sur le retrait obligatoire, un étudiant dont la MPC se trouve sous le minimum exigé peut poursuivre son programme d'études, mais est placé en probation académique jusqu'à ce que sa MPC atteigne la moyenne requise. Si, au terme de deux trimestres ou de 24 crédits, la MPC de l'étudiant n'a pas atteint le minimum exigé, celui-ci doit quitter son programme d'études. Outre les exigences relatives à la MPC, le retrait est obligatoire dans cette institution lorsqu'un étudiant échoue des cours totalisant 18 crédits ou lorsqu'il échoue un cours obligatoire pour la seconde fois¹².

Un appui sous forme d'accompagnement scolaire était offert aux étudiants qui avaient dû se retirer de leur programme d'études et qui avaient obtenu la possibilité de demeurer inscrits avec le statut de probation académique. L'accompagnement se veut un processus dynamique et modulé aux besoins et à la situation (Paul, 2002). C'est aussi une mise en présence entre un accompagnateur et un accompagné dans laquelle la relation est au cœur du processus (Le Bouëdec, 2001a; Paul, 2004). Ce lien est défini par une « quasi-horizontale » (Boutinet, 2007, p. 6) entre deux personnes de statuts comparables, c'est-à-dire que la relation se veut non-hiérarchique mais cache tout de même un déséquilibre dans les rôles, postures et savoirs de chacun (Bourassa, Cifali, & Théberge, 2010; Pasquier, 2001; Paul, 2002). L'accompagnateur adopte une attitude de distanciation et de mise en valeur de l'autre (Le Bouëdec, 2001b; Paul, 2002). Visant à soutenir l'accompagné dans l'atteinte de

¹² La source utilisée pour décrire les règlements de l'université de Manelle n'a pas été révélée dans l'objectif de protéger son anonymat.

ses buts, l'accompagnement consiste à ne pas faire à la place de celui-ci, mais plutôt à marcher à ses côtés dans une relation d'empathie, d'écoute et d'ouverture (Bourassa et al., 2010; Boutinet, 2007; Paul, 2002). Cette posture d'autonomisation favorise un travail réflexif chez l'accompagné en regard de ses croyances et pratiques pour les optimiser et développer son potentiel (Lafortune & Martin, 2004; Phillion, 2010).

En participant à ce programme d'accompagnement, les étudiants pouvaient demeurer inscrits à leur université en ayant le statut de probation académique. Cette occasion représentait pour eux une dernière chance de poursuivre leur programme d'études. La modalité d'accompagnement à laquelle Manelle a participé abordait l'expérience étudiante de manière holistique en tenant compte des plans académique et non-académique. Au cours d'un trimestre, la participante a donc bénéficié de rencontres hebdomadaires avec une accompagnatrice dans le but de l'aider à améliorer son rendement académique, à court et à long terme, en mettant l'accent sur cinq aspects généraux de la réussite universitaire, soit a) la définition d'un projet d'études et d'un projet professionnel, b) le développement de stratégies d'apprentissage essentielles à la réussite scolaire, c) l'appropriation des contenus scolaires, d) l'appui à la rédaction des travaux universitaires, et e) la résolution des défis personnels ayant des répercussions sur les études (Phillion, Bourassa, LeBlanc, Plouffe, & Arcand, 2010). Par l'entremise d'un processus d'encadrement collaboratif, l'étudiante et l'accompagnatrice travaillaient de pair pour cerner les besoins de Manelle et mettre en place un plan d'apprentissage personnalisé et structuré. Le programme incitait également les étudiants à tirer avantage des services de soutien offerts sur le campus (p. ex., le centre d'aide à la rédaction académique, les services d'orientation de carrière et les services de mentorat étudiant).

Le profil de Manelle

Manelle, une étudiante en mathématiques et statistiques, avait été admise à son programme de premier cycle universitaire en septembre 2005. Après une deuxième année d'études, sa MPC étant inférieure aux critères de rendement satisfaisants de son université, elle fut contrainte d'abandonner ses études. Elle avait toutefois obtenu la possibilité de demeurer inscrite au programme d'études, à la condition qu'elle accepte un appui scolaire en participant au programme d'accompagnement décrit plus haut. La participante avait alors 20 ans et entamait sa troisième année d'études.

Les commentaires du journal de chercheure indiquent qu'en entrevue, Manelle était ouverte et semblait avoir réfléchi à ses expériences personnelles. Elle discutait de son vécu avec aisance et abordait spontanément la signification de ses expériences. Son histoire est présentée dans les prochaines pages, sous forme de profil (Seidman, 2006).

Vie familiale

Manelle est originaire d'une région francophone isolée d'une province majoritairement anglophone. Elle a grandi dans une famille traditionnelle intacte et est l'aînée de deux filles. Elle est une étudiante de première génération, c'est-à-dire qu'aucun membre de sa famille n'a fréquenté l'université avant elle. Selon la participante, cette situation n'est pas un obstacle à ses projets, ses parents l'ayant toujours encouragée à poursuivre des études universitaires. Outre cette observation, Manelle avait peu à dire sur son statut d'étudiante de première génération.

Éducation élémentaire et secondaire

À l'école élémentaire, Manelle avait été une élève forte qui aimait apprendre et qui faisait preuve d'autonomie dans ses travaux et devoirs. Ses parents étaient présents et impliqués dans sa vie scolaire. Elle avait de bonnes relations avec les élèves de sa classe,

ainsi que le personnel scolaire, toutefois aucun rapport scolaire ne l'avait particulièrement marquée.

À son entrée au secondaire la participante aspirait déjà à poursuivre des études postsecondaires et s'y préparait. Elle obtenait de bons résultats scolaires sans investir d'efforts exhaustifs. Son passage au secondaire avait été marqué par de nombreuses amitiés avec ses compagnons de classe. Elle entretenait toujours des relations positives avec ses enseignants, mais aucun d'eux n'avait eu une influence mémorable sur son parcours. Elle souligne tout de même qu'un emploi en garderie lui avait permis de découvrir une passion pour l'éducation de la petite enfance et éveilla en elle le désir de poursuivre des études en enseignement.

Université

Manelle avait dû déménager et s'éloigner du milieu familial pour poursuivre des études universitaires, ce qu'elle perçut comme difficile. De plus, elle avait du mal à s'adapter à ses responsabilités ménagères quotidiennes ainsi qu'à la planification de son horaire chargé. À cela s'additionnent plusieurs déménagements puisqu'elle n'arrivait pas à trouver un logement confortable et propice aux études.

Lors de sa transition à l'université, l'étudiante était restée en contact avec quelques amis d'enfance et copains du secondaire, mais elle avait eu du mal à cultiver ces amitiés qui s'étaient finalement effritées au fil des mois. Par ailleurs, elle n'avait pas créé de liens significatifs dans sa ville d'accueil et dans sa communauté universitaire. Ses parents étaient toujours disponibles pour discuter et l'encourageaient dans ses études, mais elle trouvait difficile d'entretenir une relation « au bout du téléphone » avec eux. Il semble donc que la période de transition vers la vie universitaire fut caractérisée par un manque de soutien et

d'intégration autant au niveau social que dans le milieu académique comme elle l'exprime dans ce passage.

Oui, c'est facile de trouver des amis pour sortir pis toute ça mais pour avoir des amis que tu peux compter, qu'y soient là dans les temps difficiles j'ai trouvé ça vraiment différent là pis encore aujourd'hui, j'ai encore de la difficulté à pouvoir trouver quelqu'un que, t'sais si t'as besoin d'l'aide y vont être là.

Manelle disait apprécier la flexibilité du style de vie universitaire qui lui permettait d'organiser son horaire de cours et occuper un emploi à temps partiel. Par contre, elle avait été intimidée par le contexte impersonnel de son université. Elle partagea qu'elle avait été stupéfaite par le rythme effréné et la lourde charge de travail. Au moment des entrevues elle estimait ne pas avoir une conception claire des attentes de l'université face aux étudiants. « Je croyais pas que c'était pour me *crasher* dans face comme on peut dire, que c'était pour être si vite, si fort, si intense. » Elle avait pris conscience que les méthodes de travail qui lui avaient bien servi au secondaire n'étaient pas adaptées aux demandes universitaires. De surcroît, elle estimait, avec le recul, que son niveau de français n'était pas suffisant, expliquant que le « bien parler français » n'avait pas été mis en valeur à l'école élémentaire et au secondaire. Elle croyait ne pas avoir développé les habiletés linguistiques qui lui auraient permis de s'exprimer de façon adéquate à l'oral et à l'écrit en contexte universitaire. Elle en concluait qu'elle n'était pas adéquatement préparée pour des études universitaires. Ces facteurs avaient contribué à produire de faibles résultats scolaires accompagnés d'un sentiment de vulnérabilité et de déroute. « J'savais pu où aller, j'savais pas quelle direction prendre, j'savais pu quoi faire. »

En entrevue, l'étudiante nota que, de façon générale, elle appréciait les études universitaires, spécifiant qu'elle se sentait fière et satisfaite lorsqu'elle terminait un travail.

Elle considérait également qu'elle avait connu des moments de joie au cours de ses études, mais discuta beaucoup plus longuement des difficultés et soucis qu'elle avait vécus en contexte universitaire. Entre autres, il lui avait été particulièrement pénible de reconnaître que, malgré des efforts redoublés, elle n'excellait pas comme cela avait été le cas au secondaire. Elle s'était mise à douter de ses habiletés et de sa capacité à réussir, ce qui avait amoindri sa confiance personnelle.

Ça a affecté beaucoup ma confiance dans ce temps là. Je me disais 'Ben, c'tu juste moi qui a slacké, c'tu juste moi qui est pas capable au niveau universitaire ou si c'est vraiment les profs ou c'est les standards?' [...] J'me demandais si c'tait vraiment moi ou si c'était ce qui arrivait à tout le monde, si c'était normal.

Pour subvenir à ses besoins, Manelle devait travailler plus de 30 heures par semaine en plus de vaquer aux travaux ménagers. Avec cet horaire chargé, elle avait beaucoup de mal à trouver du temps pour ses études. D'abord, elle se sentait incapable d'établir une routine lui permettant d'être productive sur le campus et avait l'impression de perdre un temps précieux entre ses cours. Ensuite, elle n'arrivait pas à créer de bonnes habitudes de travail à la maison compte tenu des conditions de logements qui lui paraissaient défavorables. Il semble donc que son emploi du temps ne lui permettait pas de consacrer les efforts nécessaires à son succès scolaire.

De toute évidence, Manelle avait vécu divers obstacles et avait été surprise par les attentes élevées de l'université. Dans le tourbillon universitaire, elle se sentait incapable de suivre le rythme et de répondre aux demandes. Elle s'était sentie de plus en plus fatiguée, stressée et déprimée, puis sa capacité à se concentrer s'était éventuellement détériorée. Elle continuait à aller à ses cours et tentait de compléter les lectures et devoirs demandés, mais

malgré ses efforts, elle n'arrivait plus à porter attention en classe, comprendre ou retenir le contenu des cours et des lectures.

C'était rendu à un point que t'sais, le matin j'me levais pas pour me mettre belle, j'me levais, j'm'habillais pis j'partais pour aller à l'école. Fait que ma confiance était vraiment pas là pis ma concentration était partie. [...] Moins confiante, déprimée pis fatiguée. Fait qu'à l'école ça me tentait pu, j'étais en classe, j'étais pu capable d'arriver pis de comprendre.

Ses difficultés l'avaient plongée dans ce qu'elle qualifiait de dépression et d'épuisement. Malgré cela, elle n'avait pas fait appel aux services de soutien de son université, puisqu'elle considérait que l'institution n'avait pas comme rôle de veiller à son bien-être émotionnel et parce qu'elle avait préconçu que les étudiants universitaires devaient être autonomes dans la rédaction de leurs travaux et dans leur cheminement universitaire. Parallèlement, elle avait souffert d'une infection virale, qui l'avait amenée à être hospitalisée. Cette situation lui avait fait prendre conscience qu'elle s'était surmenée et qu'elle avait négligé sa santé. Conséquemment, elle consulta un psychologue, prit la décision d'abandonner ses cours de la session courante et concentra ses énergies à récupérer et à reprendre confiance en elle. Bien qu'ayant été mûrement réfléchi, le choix d'abandonner ses cours eut une portée importante sur son cheminement académique; les échecs provoqués par l'abandon tardif de ses cours avaient fait chuter sa MPC.

Suite à cette épreuve, Manelle avait bénéficié de sources de soutien positif. D'abord, un psychologue l'avait aidée à retrouver sa confiance en elle. Elle s'était également engagée dans une relation amoureuse avec un copain qui lui avait apporté calme, stabilité et écoute, alors qu'elle était éloignée de sa famille et vivait un stress significatif. Ces contacts avaient contribué à son rétablissement.

Ça m'donnait la chance de dire 'Ok, oui, lui y croit que j'suis capable de l'faire. Y'regarde, y fait sûr que j'le fais, j'vais l'faire, pis j'va me prouver à moi pis j'vas lui prouver à lui que oui, y'a raison d'avoir confiance en moi.

Probation académique et programme d'accompagnement scolaire

Conformément aux règlements universitaires, Manelle avait été retirée de son programme d'études, ses notes étant sous le minimum requis. Elle avait toutefois obtenu la possibilité de demeurer inscrite à son programme d'études à condition de participer à un programme d'accompagnement scolaire. Elle considérait que cet appui se présentait à un moment opportun puisqu'elle était alors remise de sa dépression et se sentait mieux physiquement et mentalement. Conséquemment, elle se sentait prête à investir les efforts requis pour poursuivre des études universitaires. De plus, elle était consciente qu'elle avait besoin de soutien et se sentait prête à y faire appel.

Lors de sa participation au programme, l'accompagnatrice avait aidé Manelle à réviser ses stratégies de travail, plus spécifiquement la prise de notes, les techniques d'études, la relaxation en préparation d'examens, la gestion du temps et la priorisation des tâches. L'étudiante indiqua que ce soutien l'avait aidée à retrouver le sentiment qu'elle était capable de réussir et avait ravivé sa motivation pour les études.

Oui, oui. Ça a beaucoup aidé. Ça m'a donné une pousse de motivation [...] y me fallait trouver ma direction pour pouvoir le faire pis j'trouve que c'est ça que [le programme] m'a donné, ça m'a donné une direction, pis ça m'a donné un peu plus d'organisation et une meilleure idée de ce qu'est l'université. Fait que ça a aidé beaucoup.

Outre ces apprentissages, qu'elle jugeait très importants et adaptés à ses besoins, Manelle considérait que la relation avec son accompagnatrice avait été déterminante dans son

cheminement. En plus du respect, de la chaleur et de la réceptivité qu'elle affichait, l'écoute et la capacité de compréhension de l'accompagnatrice avaient été marquantes dans l'expérience de Manelle. « J'l'ai trouvé très chaleureuse, pis amicale, j'ai trouvé qu'elle était facile à parler. [...] si j'aurais pas été capable de lui dire comment je me sentais, ça aurait pas fonctionné je pense. »

Issue

Lors de sa participation au programme d'accompagnement scolaire, la participante travaillait à temps complet. Elle avait choisi de suivre un seul cours pour réintégrer ses études de façon progressive. Au moment des entrevues dans le cadre de cette étude, elle avait complété ce cours avec succès et poursuivait ses études en maintenant le statut de probation académique. Malgré les obstacles auxquels elle avait fait face, la pause forcée suite à son hospitalisation et le statut de probation académique, il était clair pour Manelle qu'elle compléterait ses études universitaires.

Discussion

Dans cette étude, le protocole de recherche de Seidman (2006) fait ressortir un profil permettant de rendre compte de l'unicité et la richesse de l'expérience. De surcroît, la théorie deweyenne fournit un cadre d'analyse et offre des lentilles pour considérer l'expérience de la participante. Envisagée de ce point de vue, l'étude présente un profil fort évocateur.

Au cours de ses études élémentaires et secondaires, Manelle était une élève douée, entourée de parents présents et d'un groupe d'amis stable. Sa transition et son parcours universitaires ont toutefois été parsemés de défis et contraintes, à savoir, un manque notable de soutien personnel, des conditions de logement défavorables et des déménagements multiples, la nécessité de travailler de nombreuses heures pour subvenir à ses besoins, une incapacité à structurer son temps et à fournir les efforts requis par ses études, une pauvre

intégration dans sa communauté universitaire, ainsi que l'inhabileté à maintenir le rythme et à rencontrer les attentes universitaires. Le profil présenté concorde donc avec la littérature sur la probation académique et plus spécifiquement sur les divers obstacles du parcours universitaire rencontrés par ces étudiants (Holland, 2005; Hutson, 2006; Isaak et al., 2006-2007; Trombley, 2000-2001).

En harmonie avec une préoccupation courante (Glasser, 2009; Nance, 2007; Zuzelo, 2000), les cadres conceptuel et méthodologique adoptés favorisent une posture de recherche qui permet de voir au delà des faiblesses et défis encourus par la participante et de tirer de nouvelles leçons sur ce thème de recherche bourgeonnant. Un intérêt pour la dimension intime de l'histoire de Manelle fait émerger la nature de ses interactions dans son contexte universitaire. Bien qu'elle ait souligné le caractère agréable du sentiment d'accomplissement qu'elle vivait en complétant un travail universitaire, Manelle rapporte des situations et contextes ayant suscité des expériences de nature indésirable et désagréable. En effet, le profil de la participante fait état de plusieurs événements qui avaient généré confusion, doute et vulnérabilité au point de se questionner à savoir « J'me demandais si c'tait vraiment moi ou si c'était ce qui arrivait à tout le monde, si c'était normal ».

Ses expériences de vie ont modelé sa façon de se représenter son environnement ainsi que sa façon d'interagir avec son contexte universitaire. Les entrevues dégagent clairement la signification qu'elle attribuait à ces expériences. Son témoignage illustre que, face au cumul d'expériences difficiles, des doutes en ses capacités d'étudiante s'étaient installés, sa confiance avait été négativement affectée puis sa capacité à se concentrer s'était amoindrie, de même que son intérêt pour les études. Chacune des expériences vécues transformait Manelle en suscitant chez elle un apprentissage qui modifiait son interprétation des

expériences subséquentes. L'accumulation d'expériences difficiles avait infirmé l'image qu'elle s'était faite d'elle-même comme étudiante forte. Néanmoins, elle naviguait au meilleur de sa connaissance dans son nouveau contexte pour éventuellement assumer qu'elle était inapte en contexte universitaire, c'est-à-dire que ses méthodes étaient inadaptées, que le niveau de son français était insuffisant et qu'elle n'avait pas une conception claire des attentes du milieu universitaire. Son témoignage laisse transparaître une impression et un sentiment d'incapacité à fonctionner dans son contexte postsecondaire, et cela se reflète dans plusieurs de ses propos tels que « j'savais pu quoi faire » ou « j'étais pu capable d'arriver pis de comprendre. »

La qualité des expériences joue un rôle crucial dans le contexte académique.

Notamment, le corpus de recherche sur l'expérience optimale positionne l'individu dans son contexte et indique que celui-ci interagit, s'adapte et gère des forces environnementales (i.e., des individus, objets et symboles; Massimini & Delle Fave, 2000). En cohérence avec la théorie deweyenne, cette branche de la recherche propose que l'expérience influence le développement de l'individu en ce sens qu'elle façonne ses compétences et habiletés et stimule la recherche de défis en faisant appel à des habiletés de plus en plus sophistiquées. L'expérience de nature agréable et désirable favorise la recherche d'activités de plus en plus complexes et équilibrées face aux capacités de l'individu (Delle Fave & Massimini, 2005). Dans le cas de Manelle, suite à son hospitalisation et au retrait de ses études, elle avait bénéficié de sources importantes de soutien dans sa vie personnelle et par l'entremise du programme d'accompagnement. Ces formes de soutien positif ont, semble-t-il, généré des expériences plus agréables et plus désirables, et elles ont mené à des prises de conscience qui lui ont permis de recadrer sa façon de percevoir et d'entrer en relation avec son

environnement. Dès lors, on sent moins la déroute et l'impuissance de Manelle. Plutôt, une ouverture à de futures expériences se dessine dans le profil de l'étudiante « y me fallait trouver ma direction pour pouvoir le faire pis j'trouve que c'est ça que [le programme] m'a donné. »

Conclusion

Alors que les caractéristiques et obstacles vécus par les étudiants en probation académique sont bien documentés dans la littérature, on constate un intérêt, chez les praticiens, de mieux comprendre la dimension intime de l'expérience d'étudiants placés en probation académique (Glasser, 2009; Nance, 2007; Zuzelo, 2000). Cette étude visait justement à mieux comprendre l'expérience d'une étudiante en probation académique d'un point de vue émique.

L'entrevue qualitative et l'approche phénoménologique de Seidman (2006) ainsi que la théorie de l'expérience de Dewey (1938/1997, 1958) axée sur l'interaction, la continuité et le contexte, ont permis la construction d'un profil qui illustre la nature des interactions qu'une étudiante en probation académique négociait dans son environnement et comment elles ont influencé son interprétation du contexte de probation et sa façon d'interagir avec son environnement. Une attention particulière a été portée à la signification que l'étudiante attribuait à l'expérience et à sa qualité, spécifiquement, ses caractères (dés)agréable et (in)désirable. Le profil fait ressortir l'influence de ces expériences sur les impressions, les émotions et les attitudes évoquées par la participante. Entre autres, il met en exergue la confusion, la déroute, la vulnérabilité et le sentiment d'incapacité vécus en contexte universitaire. L'étude fait ainsi ressortir les coûts personnels considérables que la participante a endossés de même que les répercussions néfastes que l'étudiante en probation

académique était prête à endurer pour demeurer inscrite à son programme d'études et cumuler des crédits vers l'obtention de son diplôme. L'étude fait aussi émerger la portée du soutien positif reçu et détaille l'influence de la qualité de l'expérience sur le parcours de l'étudiante. Il s'agit là de résultats distincts mais non contradictoires à ce qui est présenté dans la littérature courante sur la probation académique et d'une contribution intéressante à ce domaine de recherche.

Par l'entremise de cette étude orientée sur la signification, l'influence et l'effet de l'expérience, nous nous joignons à d'autres auteurs pour proposer un regard différent posé sur les étudiants en probation académique (Humphrey, 2005-2006; Thomas, 2003; Vander Schee, 2007). Particulièrement, la perspective éémique adoptée a permis à une étudiante de partager son histoire et permet une compréhension plus détaillée et en profondeur des conditions, de la réalité et de la portée de la probation académique. Les étudiants étant au cœur d'une culture universitaire et de programmes de soutien scolaire, il importe de mieux comprendre leur expérience vécue et de considérer leur perspective à l'égard de la probation académique ainsi qu'au soutien reçu (Gallé & Lingard, 2010). Une voix dans un domaine de recherche bourgeonnant est entrée en scène.

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Thematic Connections

To satisfy the purpose of my doctoral project, I created three additional manuscripts. These were grounded in the second form of analysis proposed by Seidman (2006), which uncovers similarities and differences among the cases. They integrate the wider range of data collected in this study. Core data emerged through Seidman's three-interview protocol with the students. Supplementary information was derived from the two single in-depth interviews with the academic companion and the program developer. All interviews were analyzed in view of Riessman's (2008) thematic narrative analysis. In addition to these data sources, the fourth and fifth papers exploited a document analysis to delimit the ACP's objectives and conceptual foundation.

The third manuscript examines the collective experience of the five probationary students. It uncovered themes that were central to the students' stories. Specifically, their experience was characterized by resistance to seek help, deep personal costs, and a desire to succeed and complete undergraduate studies. These findings foster a shift away from the current focus on deficiencies and difficulties. This text will be submitted for publication in the *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory and Practice*.

The fourth manuscript explored the process of academic companioning as experienced by the five students and as supported by professional resource personnel. The analysis revealed that the companioning role included a form of guidance that sought to foster the student's reflection and address the affective quality of their probationary experience. The data also indicated that the companioning program helped students clarify their needs, fostered their adaptation to the university context, and offered personalized support through a positive relationship. This fourth text is published in the *Mevlana International Journal of Education*.

Finally, the fifth manuscript examined the sub-question that was added in view of the emerging importance of the companioning relationship as detailed earlier: What are the characteristics of a fruitful helping relationship in the context of academic probation? The thematic narrative analysis and document analysis uncovered that a rapport characterised by presence and trust as well as a comprehensive approach promoting responsibility and awareness were key. This fifth paper is published in the *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*.

Manuscript 3 – “I Refuse to Give Up!” : A Thematic Narrative Analysis of Undergraduate Students’ Storied Experience of Academic Probation

Abstract

This qualitative study collectively examined the conditions and experience undergone by five students who had been placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship. Eighteen interviews with 7 respondents were analyzed in a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1958, 1938/1997, 1934/2005). Three major themes were uncovered as central to the participating students’ experience with probation. Specifically, their experience was characterized by (a) resistance to seek help; (b) deep personal costs; and (c) a desire to succeed and complete their undergraduate studies. This study offers an interesting contribution to the developing field of research on academic probation by tapping into the complexity of the probationary experience and by shifting away from the current focus on obstacles and deficiencies often associated to academic probation.

Introduction

An important body of literature has focused on academic attrition or dropout of undergraduate students, which is defined as the “cessation of individual student membership in an institution of higher education” (Bean, 1980, p. 157). Some students voluntarily withdraw from their program of study whereas others are dismissed while they do not necessarily wish to discontinue their studies (Grayson, 2003; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975, 1987; Vaughan, 1968). This distinction warrants a focus on a specific population of students who are on the verge of dismissal, but who do not wish to discontinue their studies, that is, probationary students.

Research on academic probation is a budding field. Studies currently available are mainly descriptive and focused on reasons for being placed on probation and programs implemented to assist those on probation. Thus, authors have called for a careful examination of the phenomenon such as the comprehensive exploration of the personal experience of students placed on academic probation (Ryan & Glenn, 2002-2003; Shao, Hufnagel, & Karp, 2009-2010; Thomas, 2003; Vander Schee, 2007). This is particularly relevant given that professionals and practitioners are most concerned with this experience as lived by students (Glasser, 2009; Nance, 2007; Zuzelo, 2000). Accordingly, this qualitative study examined in-depth, the experience of five undergraduate students who were placed on academic probation and participated in an academic support program that took the form of companionship. Their past and current stories in relation to elementary and high school, university and life in general were examined to uncover common themes in their autobiographical accounts. To further our understanding of probationary experience, two interviews with the personnel involved in assisting probationary students were conducted and analyzed to corroborate the themes emerging from the student interviews.

Literature Review

As a growing field, much of the research on academic probation relies on the body of literature on academic attrition. Although literature on the specific theme of academic probation is somewhat scarce, I have accessed several articles and dissertations that reflect the state of affairs of this developing area of research. I contend that a sound investigation on the theme of academic probation should review, analyze, and critique this specific literature and not be solely supported by a related field.

This analysis of the relevant literature revealed that currently, the notion of academic probation is insufficiently defined. In view of that, I have elsewhere proposed a revised definition based on key texts (Scarf, 1957; Smith & Winterbottom, 1970) suggesting that (a) students were placed on academic probation when their grade performance is below a satisfactory threshold; (b) they could remain in their program of study but must improve their grades; and (c) they would be dismissed if they do not (Arcand & Leblanc, 2012). According to this provisional definition, academic probation can be seen as a transition process from unsatisfactory performance to either good academic standing or dismissal. These elements of definition have yet to be examined and confirmed in order to provide foundation for the emergent body of research on academic probation.

Literature on academic probation indicates that probationary students are underprepared for post-secondary education and lack qualities often related to academic success such as commitment, self-discipline, and knowledge of institutional or faculty culture and expectations. Their lack of essential tools such as study skills, time management, goal setting, note taking, and anxiety management are often stated as well (Humphrey, 2005-2006; Hutson, 2006; Kamphoff, Hutson, Amundsen, & Atwood, 2006-2007; Romainville & Noël 1998; Tovar & Simon, 2006). The list of impediments leading to academic probation

goes on to include poor concentration, inefficient study strategies, disorganization, poor preparation, procrastination, lack of motivation, employment, time constraints and poor time management, difficulty to balance school, work, and home-related responsibilities, being a caregiver, personal problems, conflicted personal relationships, personal illness, mental health issues (i.e., depression, stress, anxiety), and a lack of connectedness to campus life (Holland, 2005; Isaak, Graves, & Mayers, 2006-2007; Trombley, 2000-2001). Current investigations comparing students on academic probation to students in good standing highlight that those on probation have significantly lower high school grades, work more often in part-time jobs, and express more obstacles to academic success than students in good standing (Holland, 2005; Isaak et al., 2006-2007; Trombley, 2000-2001). One study suggests that struggling students do not recognize the shortfalls of their study skills (Isaak et al., 2006-2007). The literature reviewed on academic probation appears to centre on obstacles and characteristics leading to underperformance and tends to present these as commonalities. In light of this, Humphrey underlined that probationary students do not form a homogenous group as she observed and wished to dispel an inaccurate “notion that all probationary students are the same, they must be lazy, and they do not care” (2005-2006, p. 152). This underscores the relevance of understanding the complexity of their stories and experience.

A number of texts on academic probation concern programs developed to support probationary students. The literature highlights that there are no policies or guidelines mandating the development of such programs (Lindsay, 2000). As a result, they vary greatly in terms of structure, format, and conceptual foundation (Cogan, 2010-2011; Hildreth, 2006; Humphrey, 2005-2006; Kamphoff et al., 2006-2007; Mann, Hunt, & Alford, 2003-2004; Preuss & Switalski, 2008; Tovar & Simon, 2006). These texts report new ways of assisting students but their effectiveness is unclear. Authors have argued that results of some studies

on probationary program effectiveness appear “ambiguous” in light of questionable methodological choices (Munt & Merydith, 2011-2012, p. 462). Another group of researchers conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of studies investigating retention programs. They indicated that “even the best studies included in this review are methodologically suspect” (Valentine et al., 2011, p. 214) thus supporting Merisotis and Phipps’ (2000) assertion that research on the theme of academic support is limited, underfunded, and often inconclusive.

The reviewed literature is mainly descriptive and focused on reasons for being placed on academic probation and programs implemented to assist probationary students. Moreover, Valentine and colleagues (2011), in their systematic review of research on retention programs, highlight that there is a particular lack with regards to the understanding of students’ experience as well as their attitudes and perceptions of their educational experience and goals. There is little qualitative research, and even less research interested in the experiences and detailed accounts of students on academic probation. However, understanding the perspective and experience of those directly involved in this phenomenon is important as they are an integral part of the university culture and they are at the heart of concerted efforts and academic support modalities (Gallé & Lingard, 2010). I therefore content that an understanding of the conditions and experience relating to academic probation and support from the perspective of those involved in it is crucial and timely (Merriam, 2009). Accordingly, we conducted a qualitative investigation the stories of five undergraduate probationary students. In this text, the conditions and experience encountered by the students are taken to include the participants’ journey through the school and university system, their placement on academic probation, as well as their course through academic support that took the form of a companioning program.

Theoretical Framework: Studying Experience

Dewey theorized that experience consists of everything a person acts upon and undergoes, all that has meaning for the person, and that evokes emotions and attitudes. “It includes *what* men do and suffer, *what* they strive for, love, believe, and endure, and also *how* men act and are acted upon, the ways in which they do and suffer, desire and enjoy, see, believe, imagine” (Dewey, 1958, p. 8). Paying attention to experience has great scientific value as it brings to light a source of data that would otherwise remain concealed and inaccessible to the researcher (Dewey, 1934/2005).

The deweyan theory of experience acknowledges the individual’s existence within an environment, which inevitably involves interaction with this environmental situation. This is described as the interaction principle and postulates that experience is necessarily an interplay between the individual’s internal states and contextual conditions (Dewey, 1934/2005, 1958). This theory also posits, through the principle of continuity that experience stretches indefinitely, each fragment of history connected to and influencing the next (Dewey, 1938/1997, 1958). Each experience takes form in the environment and alters the individual’s rapport with the world by influencing the construction of attitudes. The context impresses the mind and influences the way in which things, people, and event are experienced. Experience and its meaning are thus context-dependant (Johnson, 2000).

Stories, whether they are told to oneself or to others, are a fundamental type of data accounting for experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). It is the main form through which the meaningfulness of an experience can be conveyed (Polkinghorne, 1988). Thus, the conditions and experience undergone by probationary students have been examined through an analysis of narratives of their stories. Specifically, Clandinin and Connelly (2000), drawing on Dewey’s work (1958, 1938/1997, 1924/2005),

propose a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to the study of storied experience focused on interaction, continuity, and situation. These three concepts have served as a structure to consider the student stories and organize the autobiographical accounts into key themes (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007).

The Study in Context

The broader context of the study is described in the next pages to better understand the conditions influencing the participants' personal accounts (Riessman, 2008). I will also detail the university's academic regulations and the companioning program in which the students participated.

This study took place at a large Canadian urban university where students must maintain a minimum CGPA of 3.5 on 10 in the general bachelor's programs and 4.5 on 10 in the honours bachelor's program to be in good academic standing. When a student's CGPA falls below required minimums, he may remain in his program of study on academic probation. According to the regulation on mandatory withdrawal, if the required minimum is not reached after two sessions, the student is required to withdraw from his program. Withdrawal is also mandatory when a student fails 18 course credits or when he fails a compulsory course twice.

Students who participated in this study had been withdrawn from their program of study for one of the reasons mentioned above. Winning an appeal to their mandatory withdrawal however, they were allowed to pursue their studies while receiving appropriate academic support through a companioning program tailored to their needs.

The academic companioning program (ACP) offered assistance for one term, by way of weekly one-on-one meetings with an academic companion. Specifically, it sought to facilitate the student's short and long term academic success by focusing on five broad

dimensions of academic success including (a) defining or refining academic and/or professional goals; (b) developing essential learning strategies; (c) enhancing course content knowledge; (d) improving writing skills; and (e) examining personal challenges (Philion, Bourassa, Leblanc, Plouffe, & Arcand, 2010). Through a collaborative companionship process, the student and the academic companion worked together to understand the student's needs and develop a personalized and structured learning plan, which was revisited periodically to better align the intervention. Students were also encouraged to take advantage of other services offered on campus (e.g., academic writing help centre, career services, student mentoring) as needed.

Methodology

The stories of probationary students were the object of this qualitative study. Considering that a case cannot be fully understood without knowing about similar cases, four cases were targeted (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995, 2005). Incidentally, five students responded to my recruitment letter and completed the investigation in the fall 2008.

“[I]f narratives of experience are desired, storytelling must be allowed” (Riessman, 2008, p. 23). Fittingly, core data of this study emerged through Seidman's (2006) three-interview protocol, a phenomenological approach to interviewing. This in-depth structure seeks to trace the respondents' lived experiences, appreciate the meaning attributed to these experiences (van Manen, 1997) and better understand the issues arising from the conditions and experience of probation (Atkinson, 2002). A first interview sought details of the participant's early experiences, a second interview focused on details and conditions of current experiences with activities, social interactions, and endeavours, and a third sought to uncover the meaning of experiences in the form of thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about the stories shared. The interviews were semi-structured, individual, face-to-face, informal

conversations that lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. One respondent required a fourth interview to complete his story. Through these interviews I sought to capture the students' stories as they experienced them and aimed to let the students share their thoughts and guide the study. Interestingly, when asked about their current situation and academic probation, students often detailed the situations that led to their placement on probation to respond to my questions. This explains why the findings relate, in a large part, to the events that preceded their probationary status.

As supplementary and complementary information, I conducted two additional single interviews with key personnel involved in the delivery of the ACP, that is, the academic companion and the program developer. These were also semi-structured, individual face-to-face interviews that lasted approximately 60 minutes. These two respondents shared their perspective and philosophy of academic companioning from an intervention and an administrative viewpoint.

To add further depth and rigour to the inquiry, two additional sources of data were consulted but not analyzed per se. First, the participants accepted that their academic companion's case notes through the companioning program be reviewed and compared to the stories shared (Atkinson, 2002). Secondly, a researcher journal including descriptive, methodological and theoretical notes on the inquiry process and post-interview entries was written to monitor my thoughts and keep track of the research process (Baribeau, 2004; Prigent, 2000). Core data thus emerged from a total of 18 interviews with 7 respondents. Supplementary data in the form of intervention case notes and a researcher journal were also used.

The students' stories were analyzed in view of Riessman's (2008) thematic narrative analysis. This form of analysis focuses on the content of stories with the purpose of

uncovering and thematically categorizing individuals' experience. It was favoured for its fittingness to Seidman's methodology as well as its adaptability to diverse themes and types of narrative data.

I transcribed the interviews noting the non-verbal details such as pauses and emphases. Obtaining nearly 400 pages of transcripts, I performed two rounds of data reduction to achieve a manageable corpus while preserving the logic, chronology, and meaning of the stories. To map students' experience, I isolated interview segments that were particularly eloquent or recurring and categorized them into key themes using the Nvivo 8 software (QSR International, 2007). The interviews with the academic companion and program developer were added in the thematic analysis to counterpoint the students' experience.

Findings and Discussion: Five Students' Experiences

To begin, I offer a brief portrayal of each of the five students who participated in this study. The three key themes emerging from their stories are then presented. It should be noted that pseudonyms have been used in this manuscript to protect the participants' anonymity. Also, seeing as Manelle and Leena are francophone, like myself, their interviews occurred in French and their quotes included in this manuscript have been translated.

Portraits of the Participants

A brief description of each participant, including key information on family life, elementary school and high school contextualize the subsequent analysis (Creswell, 2012).

Manelle.

Manelle was 20 years old and in her third year of study in the Department of mathematics and statistics when she participated in the companioning program. My

researcher journal indicates that Manelle was frank and acutely aware of her school and university experience.

She revealed growing up in a traditional family unit with both her parents and a younger sister. Neither her parents completed post-secondary studies but they encouraged her to pursue undergraduate studies. Manelle always enjoyed school, worked independently, and obtained good grades in both elementary and high school. Close bonds with friends and positive relations with teachers also characterize her early schooling experience.

Eva.

Eva was in her third year of study in the Department of visual arts. My researcher log specifies that Eva was positive and talkative, volunteering details about her experience suggesting she had reflected on previous experience and their significance.

Eva grew up in a traditional family with both parents and an older sibling. Her parents instilled discipline with regards to school and homework. All family members were crafty, which stimulated Eva's interest for the arts. She generally enjoyed school and was eager to learn. Relationships with friends and teachers were predominant in her stories about elementary and high school. As a student, she had been successful and committed.

Mark.

Mark was 22 years old and in his third year of studies in the General Arts program when he participated in the companioning program. My researcher journal noted the density of his telling. He shared relevant factual details of experiences as well as their significance.

Mark grew up with his mother, who worked two jobs to make ends meet, and two older stepsisters. His father and maternal grandfather were also important figures in his life. Neither parents completed post-secondary studies. Reportedly, Mark was not challenged in elementary and high school and put little effort in his studies. Numerous moves during

childhood prevented him from establishing lasting friendships. Sports were central in his school experiences and friendships. He had mixed feelings about his teachers. Some recognized his talent and encouraged him. With others, he had conflicting relationships.

Leena.

Leena was a 22-year-old second year theatre student when she took part in the companioning program. As noted in my researcher journal, she was enthusiastic, talkative and direct as she detailed her story.

Leena was an only child but an older cousin had lived with her and her parents as she was growing up. Her parents did not attend university but hoped she would obtain a university diploma. Throughout elementary and high school, she had been surrounded by friends and cousins and generally had positive relationships with her teachers. In elementary school she generally obtained good grades and was involved in various extracurricular activities. Through the years good study habits had given way to a tendency to party and experiences with drugs and alcohol.

Anny.

Anny was a 22-year-old student in her fourth year of studies in the General Arts program at the time she participated in the ACP. As documented in my researcher journal, this respondent seemed reserved and related few details events. I gauged the amount of probing I presented with the intent to respect her privacy.

Anny grew up with her parents and a younger brother. Her parents, who did not attend university, wished she would obtain a university degree but she never felt pressured in this regard. She believed her journey in elementary and high school was ordinary and uneventful. Independent in her work, she did not require much help from her parents or

teachers. She had good friends in school and got along with teachers but did not recall significant relationships or noteworthy experiences.

Emerging Themes and Discussion

The qualitative nature and the focus on the deweyan theory of experience in this study allowed an expanded view of the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship. It offers a portrait that goes beyond the immediate impediments they face. The thematic narrative analysis showcases ideas that were most eloquent or recurring in the accounts shared. Specifically, the analysis of the students' stories uncovered three central themes that characterized their experience, namely, (a) a resistance to seek help; (b) deep personal costs; and (c) a desire to succeed and complete undergraduate studies. Thematic connections across the cases allowed recognizing similarities and differences between stories. In the following section I offer summation and comments on thematically organized excerpts, supported by a large amount of quotations, which represent the participants' voice and exemplify thematic connections.

Theme 1: Help Seeking.

The participants' stories suggest that they took responsibility for the difficulties they faced in university as expressed by Mark: "If I struggled it was self-inflicted. I really don't think it's on the school to deal with my mental psychology. (...) And I think it would be unfair for me to say that my failure was because o' the school." Particularly, students explained that it was up to them to address the difficulties they faced and they could do so by investing the required effort in their studies and seeking assistance. In this regard, Anny, for instance offered: "I pushed myself to finish it and just do it. If I would've done that for the entire time I would never have been in this situation because when I put the effort into it and

when I focused myself, I did well.” In spite of this, none of them sought support from the services available on campus.

Different justifications were employed by the students to explain why they did not exploit the network of services and programs offered by their university. Their initial reflex was to rationalize that they were not aware of the campus’ success services, which was surprising given the plethora of advertisement strategies used on campus to insure visibility and the comprehensive array of innovative and responsive services and programs offered. Through discussion, the participants further clarified why they did not take advantage of the services offered to them on campus. Admittedly, they did not recognize the extent of their difficulties, what type of help they needed, or how to obtain it, as Anny expressed:

I think I was a little bit stubborn in not wanting to admit that [I needed help] but at the same time it’s not easy to figure out how to go about asking and getting help. (...)

I mean when I wanted to switch programs, I hoped somebody could say “This is your situation, and if this is your goal, this is what you have to do.” But nobody said that. So I didn’t go and ask the right questions cause I didn’t know who to ask kinda thing. (...) I guess I didn’t realize, I didn’t know that I needed help with my essays, or I didn’t want to take the time out. And again, I didn’t know what I was supposed to be asking for.

The stories also showcase that the participants preferred to sort things on their own. For instance, it was clear that Mark felt he did not need academic support: “In fact I’m not sure that I had needs. Maybe the need to be a little more disciplined, and just by having people watching how I’m doing, it gave me that added pressure to make me focus.” In addition, the participants perceived stigma around help seeking and pressure to succeed by their own means in the university context. They assumed that their struggles were unusual

which made them feel inappropriate. Not wanting to shed light on a situation that felt humiliating, they avoided the success services. Eva powerfully expressed her experience in this regard:

I thought if I needed to see somebody, you know, it would be really serious (...) Like when I was seeing [my academic companion] last year I didn't tell anybody (...) like my parents don't know. (...) I think it was because I wasn't proud of... um... [pause]

Interviewer: Not having done as good as you had hoped maybe?

Yeah. I wasn't proud of that. And it's not something that I was gonna go around saying I'm seeking help because I didn't do well. (...) Yeah, I was... I was embarrassed. So I didn't want to say anything (...) I thought it was something that was wrong with me. And I was afraid to approach them [success services]. And I felt that like everybody else... I thought I was the only one having trouble.

In the face of the multiple challenges they underwent, the participants of this study sidestepped the assistance available to them. The two single interviews with professional resource personnel corroborate and further elucidate students' avoidance of academic help. The program developer specified that students who are in greater difficulty, those who would most benefit from academic support are less inclined to seek help than students who merely need a little push. That said, the academic companion, like the students, regrettably observed that the university setting seems to suggest students must be independent. Given this general impression, she understood students' inclination to keep to themselves and handle things on their own rather than risk being categorized as a "student in difficulty" by consulting success services. She indicated, however, that the very purpose of academic companionship is to promote students' autonomy by offering tools and strategies students can take ownership of and evolve with.

Authors have recognized the perplexity of struggling students who act like all is going well rather than seeking help (Austin, Cherney, Crowner, & Hill, 1997). Asking for help can be deeply stressful, especially given the strong negative feelings experienced regarding the probationary status. To cater this, authors suggest that representatives of university support services should favour a style of communication that is non-threatening, non-authoritative, and non-patronizing in their contact with students to incite them to take advantage of academic support (Cruise, 2002; Silverman & Juhasz, 1993).

Echoing the program developer's words, the literature on academic attrition indicates that those most in need of academic support are the least inclined to seek it voluntarily (Butler, 1999; Michaut, 2003; Rebond, 2003). Interestingly, Karabenick and Knapp's work helps elucidate the complex issue of help seeking in university. Results of one study proposed a curvilinear (inverted U shape) relation between help-seeking and need for assistance wherein students with moderate needs seek help most frequently (Karabenick & Knapp, 1988). Threatening feelings of stigmatization and of being unsupported in the university context (Thomas, 2003) as well as negative emotions, expectations of failure, and attempts to protect one's self-worth may be at play in this relation (Karabenick & Knapp, 1988). Other factors are believed to influence help seeking such as self-esteem (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991) and ethnicity (Tovar & Simon, 2006).

Theme 2: Personal Costs of Academic Probation

A second theme emerged from the students' stories, that is, the personal costs of struggling in university and being placed on academic probation with the impending possibility of being asked to withdraw from their program of study. Anny diverted the discussions about her deep personal experience with academic probation, which I respected by not pushing her to elaborate. The other participants addressed this theme in evocative

ways. They discussed the negative feelings of being disappointed with themselves, morally defeated, and discouraged. They emphasized that they had been successful students in high school and had been surprised to struggle in higher education. Their difficulty to meet university standards generated distress and affected their self-perception. Eva became teary as she discussed the emotional cost of her academic struggles:

It's difficult for me because when I was in high school, in elementary school, I was always really eager, I was always like at the top of the class. And I would've never pictured myself here now, in this situation. That's why when I went to see [my academic companion] last year, it was so difficult for me and I was so disappointed in myself.

In addition to the emotional hardship involved, Manelle made explicit the extent of the personal toll her university experience affected her well-being. She actively sought to meet university expectations while working to provide for herself, never compromising any of her commitments. She eventually felt helpless, overwhelmed, exhausted, and unable to focus in class. In the face of intense struggles she temporarily abandoned her studies and required the help of a psychologist to eventually recover and reintegrate her studies.

I got sick, I got into some kind of depression, I didn't want to do anything, I couldn't get up in the morning to go to class. I think it hit me so hard, the university mode was so fast and I could never feel organized, I need to be organized. And so I didn't know where to go, I didn't know what direction to take, I didn't know what to do. And when I got sick, it's just, everything hit me so hard. (...) I couldn't focus anymore. (...) Less confident, depressed, tired. So school, I wasn't into it anymore, like I was in class and I couldn't understand anything. I tried to avoid the fact that it wasn't

working. It was like “I’m going to school, I’m on track” (...) I went to class for nothing. I would get out of there not having learned one thing.

The obstacles faced by the student respondents highlight the impairment to their self-esteem. Mark clearly exposed the effect failure had on him:

When you fail, you feel like a failure, right? And that is just a breeding ground for insecurity. You think that you can’t achieve things, or what you set out to do.

Especially in university where it seems like everybody else is doing well, you know?

This awareness spawned persistent apprehension of impending withdrawal from his program of study. Experiencing difficulties and failure presented an attack to the participants’ confidence, which led them to doubt their academic abilities, the quality of the work they produced, and ultimately their sense of belonging in university. Manelle was explicit in this regard:

It affected my confidence. I started doubting myself and wondering “Is it just me who slacked off? Is it just me who can’t cut it in university?” (...) I was wondering if it was just me or if this happened to everyone, if it was normal.

Students also discussed the effects of a loss of confidence. Their interviews illustrated that their self-confidence was associated to their capacity to perform optimally in university. To this effect, Mark convincingly proposed: “I think that you cannot write your best, or perform your best if you don’t have confidence.” In Leena’s case, low marks and difficult interactions with teachers and fellow students not only devastated her self-confidence, it also affected her self-perception as exemplified here:

“Whatever question I asked in class, it was stupid. I was clueless. (...) I stopped asking questions or making comments in class (...) I’m not really a good student. I

learn better on my own, by reading. I'm independent. Don't put me in a big class, in a lecture, you know, the university system, it doesn't work for me."

These accounts illustrate the personal costs ensued by academic struggles and probation. The perception of the academic companion echoed this observation. In her view, many of the students she worked with possessed the key characteristics to be successful in university. She considered that it was important in her work to reassure them on their ability to do well academically as their self-esteem and confidence were crushed. The program developer's view was consistent with the academic companion's. She indicated that many probationary students had the potential to succeed in university and she felt compelled to help them find ways to enhance their self-esteem.

In this study, the diverse perspectives emphasize the personal costs of academic probation rather than focusing on characteristics and obstacles face by probationary students. Few authors have anecdotally mentioned the negative feelings experienced by probationary students, their despair, shame, and vulnerability, highlighting that being on probation paralyzes them academically (Glasser, 2009; Zuzelo, 2000). The psychological impact of academic probation includes injury to students' sense of self, well-being (Nance, 2007), and self-esteem (Dozot, Piret, & Romainville, 2009). Other works occasionally refer to the damaging effects of academic probation without detailing their experiences (Butler, 1999; Cruise, 2002; Ryan & Glenn, 2002-2003). It thus appears appropriate to engage in dialogue in the research field about the personal and emotional costs of academic probation and the relevance of attending to this dimension in the process of support.

Theme 3: Desire to Succeed

The students' firm desire to complete their university studies strongly emerged from their stories. All participants had initiated undergraduate studies, eager to learn and succeed. In sharing their stories they conveyed their interest for learning and recounted instances where they felt strongly attuned to education expectations in elementary, high school, and in university. In differing ways, their respective enthusiasm progressively lessened as expressed by Leena: "Since I started university I lost the desire to succeed for myself. (...) Like, in grade 12, there was no way I wouldn't do well."

The five stories illustrate considerable persistence on the part of the participants of this study. Regardless of the difficulties they faced or the depth of the personal costs they underwent the students carried on their student activities refusing to give up. Their determination to succeed was evident and explicitly expressed throughout their accounts. Even though they did not seek help in the face of challenges, they remained focused on their studies as exemplified by Eva's story. When unexpectedly feeling disconnected from a program of study she had actively sought, her eagerness weakened and she became unfulfilled by her university experience. Yet, she did not lose sight of her goal to complete undergraduate studies.

So it's just like a lack of interest in the studio classes that are here. (...) And I'm realizing that was really hard for me to deal with, because I worked so hard to get here. And I want to finish but I'm not happy. So what do you do, you continue or you just stop and do something else but I refuse to give up!

Even more so, it seems the students were prepared to face the difficulties and willing to confront the challenges involved in their academic process. Leena was persuasive in this

respect: “I can face them [challenges]. It takes a lot to faze me now. I can react to moments of stress, whatever it is, I know I can deal with it.”

The importance of completing studies was consensual among the participants. It stemmed from different basis, however. In some cases, obtaining a diploma was an end in itself. For instance, although she did not tie it to underlying motives, Annie’s resolve to complete her undergraduate studies was evident as transpired in this excerpt.

Interviewer: Is that what kept you in school?

It was really the need to finish, especially in the last part of it, like my last year I had a job that I really liked and woulda preferred to be working than coming to school. And at the same time, I had somebody to sort of tell me like you just finish it, ultimately, finish it. (...) And I always knew that it was beneficial too. (...) for the most part, I pushed myself to finish it and just do it. (...) I definitely did it, definitely finished.

In other cases, students’ determination was sustained by a motivation to achieve a career. Mark’s evident ambition to complete his studies was tied to a belief that post-secondary studies allowed rising above working class in today’s economy. This was undoubtedly imperative in his personal journey as eloquently conveyed here:

There is that stigma that if you don’t go to college or university you’re gonna be stuck in lower middle class your whole life if you’re lucky. I just did a seminar presentation in one of my classes and I was talking about this guy’s workweek. He used to work something like 70 hours a week. And it was in a factory for minimum wage. And I was saying, to put it in perspective (...) you’re a full time student, you study 50 hours a week and you work 20 hours a week. (...) And you’re working for something more. You’re not in a factory with no room for improvement. He was

there for his life and he wasn't doing anything else. That was it! Ah man!! (...) You need to feel like you're gonna be getting more later on. Freedom from want, right? And I think there's a stigma that if you don't go to college or university, you're never gonna be free from want, you know?

Combined with the significance attached to this belief Mark's aspiration to become a writer drove him to turn things around and involve himself in his studies after facing compulsory withdrawal. He was able to prioritize his studies over his social, party life and his love for free writing which had captured too much of his time and attention for a while.

The participants' aspiration to complete their undergraduate studies was evident in their stories. It appears that persistence originated and was exerted differently however. In some cases obtaining a university diploma was itself the aspired outcome whereas other participants' tenacity was linked to future projects, which helped sustain their motivation in their studies. The academic companion testified to this manifest determination. She explained that she regularly witnessed this desire not only to succeed, but to make it on their own. Although this may worsen the experience of failure, she respects students' rhythm and gladly welcomes them when they are ready to receive her help. In many cases this support necessitates reassurance about their ability to be successful in university. If their determination remains solid, students' self-confidence is often injured by failure and by the status of academic probation. In addition to this, the interviews with both the academic companion and the program developer highlighted the importance of allowing students to assume responsibility for their academic progress and success by helping them acquire tools and strategies to become independent learners. In their view, this taps into their determination to make it on their own and fosters their persistence.

It is particularly remarkable that the students' stories, regardless of the obstacles encountered, depict an eagerness and commitment to complete undergraduate studies. In some cases participants were mainly driven to meet requirements in order to obtain a diploma. In others, they aspired to learn, grow, and pursue a passion and coveted career path. Regardless of the motive behind this determination, these students' behaviors and attitude testify to their commitment to invest time, resources, as well as physical and psychological energy as needed to satisfy the demands of university (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1987, 2006-2007). Other authors have acknowledged probationary students' resolve to succeed despite the struggles they experience. Their persistence was noted in a Canadian study where the majority of students continued to enrol and strive to succeed even when placed on probation for a second time or required to withdraw temporarily (Douglas College, 2002). To explain this, Silverman and Juhasz (1993) suggested that many probationary students, despite of the status and ensuing personal costs, see themselves as capable and believe they can succeed in the face of adversity. The participants' dedication to their studies and objectives are remarkable, particularly when considering the harm of failure on their self-esteem (Dozot et al., 2009), their sense of self and well-being (Nance, 2007).

Concluding Remarks

This qualitative study depicts the stories of students who are on the verge of dismissal, but who do not wish to withdraw from their program of studies. As recently called for, it intended to examine the conditions and experience undergone by five undergraduate students who participated in an ACP after being placed on academic probation. In this endeavour, 18 interviews with 7 respondents were analyzed. Specifically, students' past and current stories in relation to school, university and general life were collectively examined and supplemented with the perspective of key resource personnel involved in the ACP. This

analysis was complemented by the review of companioning case notes and a researcher journal.

The thematic narrative analysis (Riessman's, 2008) and a specific focus on the context and meaning of experience (Dewey, 1958, 1938/1997, 1934/2005) lent three themes that were central to the stories of five probationary students. Specifically, their experience was characterized by (a) resistance to seek help, (b) deep personal costs, and (c) a firm desire to succeed and complete undergraduate studies. Put forth, these results represent a notable contribution to the body of literature that currently oversimplifies probationary students' experience and tends to emphasize their shortcomings. By providing a rich and complex illustration of the lived experience of probationary students, this study helps move away from a focus on characteristics and difficulties associated to probation. It promotes a proactive dialogue regarding the emotional dimension involved in academic probation as well as the probationary students' commitment to complete their studies.

An observation that the scope of research on academic probation is currently skewed as it focuses on probationary characteristics and presents these as commonalities aroused my curiosity and enthusiasm to find out more about different points of view. I thus took on this study seeking to hear the perspective and experience of individuals directly involved with the phenomenon of academic probation. As conveyed by researchers interested in the theme of underachievement, I refrained from the label and the current received view on probation and probationary students with an intent to hear their stories about their experience (Balduf, 2009; Neumeister & Hébert, 2003). This favors a broader, deeper appreciation of the phenomenon (Schultz, 2002).

Adopting this approach, which is commonly ignored in the literature, has provided insights that do not contradict but enhance the literature on academic probation. Considering

the perspectives and experience of those involved with academic probation lends three main lessons. First, it portrays the complex issue of help seeking including emotions and thoughts associated to it. Second giving a voice to the students and support personnel puts forth the personal costs endured by probationary students and the injury to their sense of self they tolerated in order to remain in their program of study. Finally, a remarkable desire and will to succeed transpire in the stories presented here.

Other students experience academic probation. Many may have equally interesting stories to share, and a closer look at these would help further our understanding of academic probation. Through the current study focused on the perspectives of participants, new insights have emerged. We hope these will inform the way we think and approach students who experience academic probation.

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Manuscript 4 – Academic probation and companioning: Three perspectives on experience and support

Abstract

This qualitative study explored the process of academic companioning as experienced by five undergraduate probationary students and as supported by two professional resource persons. Data was collected through multiple in-depth interviews and analyzed using a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, which provided a fitting framework for a thematic narrative analysis. A document analysis was also used to determine how the conceptual foundation of the academic companioning program aligned with the students' experience. Our analysis suggests congruence between the multiple sources of data examined. Key findings shed light on the nature of the companion's role defined by a specific form of guidance and attendance to students' self-confidence. Findings also illustrate how the program's structure caters to students experience by facilitating an acknowledgement of their own needs, helping them better understand the university context, and offering personal support.

Keywords: academic probation; academic companioning; experience; narrative inquiry; document analysis;

Introduction

The topic of academic attrition, defined as the termination of student membership (Bean, 1980) is abundantly discussed in the literature. With regard to the circumstances of termination, however, an important distinction must be acknowledged. Indeed, while some students voluntarily withdraw from their program of study, others are dismissed (Grayson, 2003; Tinto, 1975, 1987; Vaughan, 1968). This warrants a focus on a specific population of students who are on the verge of dismissal, but who do not wish to withdraw from their program of studies. In fact, probationary students are in an in-between space flanked by satisfactory academic standing and mandatory withdrawal (Arcand & Leblanc, in press a).

In a budding field of research, most studies currently available on academic probation are descriptive and focus on student characteristics, reasons leading to probation, and programs implemented to assist probationary students. Contrasting with this restricted scope, researchers have called for an examination of probationary as experienced by students (Ryan & Glenn, 2002-2003; Shao, Hufnagel, & Karp, 2009-2010; Thomas, 2003; Vander Schee, 2007). At the same time, professionals and practitioners express the need to focus on the lived experience of those who struggle in higher education (Glasser, 2009; Nance, 2007; Zuzelo, 2000). Accordingly, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the process of one academic companioning¹³ program as experienced by undergraduate probationary students and as supported by professional resource personnel.

¹³ As further discussed in the following pages, we use Wolfelt's (1999; 2004) term "companioning" in this text as it justly translates the helping relationship as the heart of the support program in question.

Academic Probation

An analysis of the literature indicates that academic probation is not formally defined as yet. In view of that we have elsewhere proposed a preliminary conceptualization suggesting that (a) students were put on academic probation when their grade performance was below a satisfactory threshold; (b) they could remain in their program of study but must increase their grades; and (c) they would be dismissed if they did not (Arcand & Leblanc, in press a, b). In other words, we suggest that academic probation can be seen as a transition between unsatisfactory performance to either acceptable academic standing or to dismissal. These elements of definition have yet to be examined and confirmed in order to provide a solid foundation for the burgeoning body of research on academic probation.

Conditions of Academic Probation

Institutions define their criteria of academic probation, which vary from one university to the other. In the large Canadian urban university where this study took place, students must maintain a minimum cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 3.5 on 10 in the general bachelor's programs and 4.5 on 10 in the honours bachelor's program in order to be in good academic standing. As per the university's regulations on mandatory withdrawal, a student whose CGPA falls below these required minimums may remain registered in his program of study, but will be on academic probation until his CGPA reaches satisfactory standing. If this condition is not met after two sessions or 24 course credits, the student will be required to withdraw from his program. In addition to these grade specifications, withdrawal is mandatory when a student fails 18 course credits or when he fails a compulsory course twice.

Academic Support Programs

Most institutions of higher education offer support programs to provide probationary students with tools and strategies to raise their CGPA. Seeing as there are no guidelines mandating the development of probationary programs, they vary greatly in terms of structure, format, and theoretical foundation (Lindsay, 2000). For instance, support is offered through group workshop-based interventions (Coleman & Freedman, 1996; Humphrey, 2005-2006; Shao et al., 2009-2010), individualized academic advising (Mann, Hunt, & Alford, 2003-2004; Newton, 1990) or combined forms of interventions (Kamphoff, Hutson, Amundsen, & Atwood, 2006-2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006). Concurrently, some support programs emphasize learning skills (e.g., note taking, examination anxiety reduction, time management; Mann et al., 2003-2004) while others focus on personal support (Kamphoff et al., 2006-2007). Finally, length and time commitment vary from one session (Hildreth, 2006) to semester long interventions (Mann et al., 2003-2004).

Little research has addressed students' lived experiences of academic probation or the support process although this should not be overlooked (Vander Schee, 2007). Studies collected probationary students' stories in order to better understand the experience of being on academic probation (Arcand & Leblanc, in press b; Thomas, 2003). However, more attention and sound research must be devoted to understand the experience of academic companionship, given a probationary status.

Academic Companionship

In the U.S. literature, a major component of probationary programs is called "academic advising". Three approaches of academic advising prevail; (a) prescriptive advising : an outcome-oriented course of action whereby the expert advisor pinpoints the needs of the student and proposes a plan of action (Molina & Abelman, 2000; Vander Schee,

2007), (b) developmental academic advising : a collaborative, process-oriented, and aims to help the student develop holistically as an educated adult (Harrison, 2009; Vander Schee, 2007), and (c) intrusive advising : high involvement advising which emphasizes the advisor – advisee relationship, proposes assistance activities on a regular basis, and fosters student motivation and responsibility (Molina & Abelman, 2000; Vander Schee, 2007; Schwebel, Walburn, Jacobsen, Jerrolds, & Klyce, 2008).

The francophone literature employs the expression of “*accompagnement scolaire*” to designate a similar process described as an approach that capitalizes on the support relationship and advocates doing with, rather than doing for. This comprehensive, personalized and individualized support seeks to help the student take ownership of his progress and regain confidence in his capacities as a student (Dozot & Romainville, 2004; Glasman, 2001; Romainville, 2000; Romainville & Noël, 1998). We believe the term and definition of *companioning* translates justly the notion of “*accompagnement*” as a helping relationship that promotes being present to another person, respecting the person’s needs, and listening with the heart (Wolfelt, 1999; 2004). In keeping with this conceptualization, the term *companion* is proposed to describe the person who has the role of walking alongside and being patiently present to the other, seeking to stir their inner force and find new connections in their world (Wolfelt, 2009). Accordingly, we use the expressions *academic companioning* and *academic companion* in the following pages.

Methodology

A main genre through which the meaningfulness of an experience can be conveyed is the story (Polkinghorne, 1988). Whether told to oneself or to others, the story is a fundamental type of data accounting for experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Appropriately, the experience of academic probation and companioning

has been explored through an analysis of narratives of life stories. Specifically, Clandinin and Connelly (2000, 2007), drawing on Dewey's work (1958, 1934/2005, 1938/1997), propose a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to the study of storied experience characterized by continuity, interaction, and situation. To be more precise, investigations of this nature focus on the temporal dimension, that is they situate the story in a given time, with a past, a present, and a projected future. They also address social interactions as they represent a significant aspect of a lived experience. Finally, they detail the contextual milieu of a storied experience as a major factor informing the interpretation. These concepts have guided our analysis of the experience of academic probation and companioning.

The main strategy of data collection used in this study was qualitative interviews, generating three perspectives, that of the students, the academic companion, and the program developer. In so doing, we collected an emic point of view from three different angles (Merriam, 2009). A document analysis was also helpful to understand the institutional context of academic companioning and probationary experience. The data collection and analysis procedures are described below but first, we present the participants involved in this study.

Participants

A letter of recruitment was sent to the 24 students who took part in an academic companioning program (ACP) in the fall 2007. Five students expressed an interest in the current study and completed the data collection in the fall 2008. Aged between 20 and 22¹⁴ years, they were registered in their second, third or fourth year of studies in various undergraduate programs in a large urban Canadian university. Four participants were women

¹⁴ One participant did not disclose her age.

and one was a man. Three were Anglophones and two were Francophones¹⁵. Pseudonyms were attributed to each study participant who are briefly profiled in the next paragraph.

Manelle, the first participant, was from a traditional family composed of both parents and a younger sister. Neither her parents completed post-secondary studies but they encouraged her to pursue an undergraduate diploma. She enjoyed school, worked independently, and obtained good grades in both elementary and high school. She transitioned to university in September 2005 and studied in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics.

Similarly, Eva grew up with both parents and an older sister. Her parents instilled discipline with regards to school and homework. She enjoyed elementary and high school studies, was generally eager to learn, and had been successful and involved as a student. She was studied in the Department of Visual Arts but she did not disclose when she was admitted.

Thirdly, Mark grew up with his mother, who worked two jobs to make ends meet, and two older stepsisters. His father and maternal grandfather were also important figures in his life. As he was growing up, his family moved numerous times, which required transitioning to different schools. Reportedly, he was not challenged in elementary and high school and put little effort in his studies. He was admitted in the General arts bachelor in the fall 2004.

Leena was an only child who grew up with both her parents, neither of whom attended university. In elementary school she generally obtained good grades and was

¹⁵ Interviews with Francophone participants occurred in French and their quotes used in this manuscript have been translated by the authors.

involved in various extracurricular activities. Through the years good study habits gave way to a tendency to party and experiences with drugs and alcohol with high school friends. She entered the Department of Theatre in the fall 2004.

Anny grew up in a traditional family unit. Her parents did not attend university but hoped she would obtain a university degree. She described herself as independent in her schoolwork, saying she did not require much help from her parents or teachers and believed her journey in elementary and high school was ordinary and uneventful. She pursued undergraduate studies in the General Arts program in September 2003.

To enrich our analysis, we solicited the participation of key personnel involved in the development and delivery of the ACP, namely the academic companion who worked with the five above-mentioned students and the program developer. An email invitation was sent and they both accepted to complete the data collection. Pseudonyms were used in this manuscript to protect their anonymity.

Connie, the academic companion held a degree in counseling and psychopedagogy. She had over 10 years experience as a learning specialist in a university. She was chosen as the academic companion in this specific program for her extensive knowledge of the university setting and the services it offered, her understanding of the variety and uniqueness of difficulties students face, her capacity to address cognitive as well as emotional aspects of student life, and her expertise in study skills and methods.

Denise, the program developer had a strong background in special education. As a learning specialist she had worked in the field of academic support and learning in higher education for over 15 years. She also conducted research on academic attrition and retention. Her extensive field and research experience led her to envision and develop an ACP aimed at

supporting those students who are in deep academic struggle, that is, students facing mandatory withdrawal.

Document Analysis

To grasp the experience of academic companioning of the study participants, we conducted a document analysis to delimit the companioning program's objectives and conceptual foundation (Holbrook, 1996). Texts associated to the program were analyzed according to the research purpose (Salminen, Lyytikäinen, & Tiitinen, 2000). They included (a) the university support services' web page, (b) a research proposal describing the rationale behind the development and implementation of the companioning program, (c) the program's logic model, and (d) a published article reporting on the effectiveness of the program (Philion, Bourassa, Leblanc, Plouffe, & Arcand, 2010). Documents were carefully reviewed to uncover the frame wherein the program was developed, thus informing the condition of academic probation at the university where the study took place and the companioning process in which the participants were involved.

Qualitative Interviewing

To trace the students' lived experiences and appreciate the meaning attributed to these experiences, we drew on Seidman's (2006) phenomenological approach to interviewing, an in-depth methodology. Specifically, the three-interview structure, conducted with the five students in this study, sought to (a) uncover details of the participant's early experiences, (b) understand current experiences with activities, social interactions, and endeavors, and (c) consider the meaning attributed to such experiences in the form of thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about the stories shared. These student interviews were semi-structured, individual, face-to-face, informal conversations that lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. One student required a fourth interview to complete his story. In total, we thus

completed 16 interviews with probationary students participating in the companioning program.

We conducted two additional single interviews with key personnel involved in the development and delivery of the ACP. Specifically, the academic companion who worked with the five probationary participants and the program developer accepted to share their outlook. Each participated in one semi-structured, individual face-to-face interview that lasted approximately 60 minutes. The professional resource persons shared their experience, perspective, and philosophy of academic companioning from a practitioner and administrative viewpoint.

Findings stemmed from a total of 18 interviews with 7 respondents. They were investigated in view of Riessman's (2008) thematic narrative analysis, focusing on the content of storied accounts and the categorization of experience. The transcribed student stories and the two single interviews were imported in the Nvivo 8 software (QSR International, 2007) to map the shared experience. Interview segments that were particularly eloquent or recurring were classified into key themes. All three perspective were integrated in the same coding scheme but were distinguished in the interpretation phase as called for by the research purpose.

Findings

This qualitative study explored the process of academic companioning as experienced by five undergraduate probationary students and as supported by professional resource personnel. In this endeavor, we begin by describing the ACP based on a document analysis. This, in line with the three-dimensional inquiry space, details the contextual milieu in which the experience took place.

Then, illustrating the temporal and social dimensions of the stories, we present an analysis of the interview data. This analysis defined the meaningful role of the academic companion as perceived by the three parties involved in the experience of academic probation. In a subsequent section we report the needs expressed by the students and contrast them to the perspective of the academic companion and the program developer.

Academic companioning program (ACP)

The document analysis helps identify and understand the objectives, intentions, posture, and values in the implementation of the ACP and thus place the probationary students' experience in context. The companioning program was offered to students who had been required to withdraw from their program of study due to unsatisfactory grade performance. Winning an appeal to their mandatory withdrawal however, they were allowed to continue their studies while receiving academic support through a program tailored to their needs. The program proposed individual support for one term, by way of weekly one-on-one meetings with an academic companion. The program's approach sought to foster the development of rapport and trust between the academic companion and the student. The companion sought to understand the experience of the student, in and outside of university and offered support in relation to the particular challenges expressed.

The companioning process' objective was to facilitate the student's short and long term academic success by focusing on five broad dimensions of academic success including (a) defining or refining academic and/or professional goals, (b) developing essential learning strategies, (c) enhancing course content knowledge, (d) improving writing skills, and (e) examining personal challenges. Through a collaborative companioning process, the student and companion worked together to understand the student's needs and develop a personalized and structured learning plan, which was revisited periodically to better align the

intervention. It was hoped that the student would reflect and learn about himself, his learning style, methods, and strategies, as well as his experience in higher education. Students were also encouraged to take advantage of the many support services offered on campus (e.g., academic writing help centre, career services, student mentoring) as needed.

The first two program meetings consisted of semi-structured interviews on the student's university experience. Needs and goals with respect to the five above-mentioned program dimensions were a specific focus of the interviews, which informed the development of an individualized and flexible learning plan that launched the intervention. Additionally, the student was encouraged to keep a weekly reflective journal on his progression through the program. Lastly, a final interview re-examined the student's initial learning plan and assessed whether they remained relevant for him and to what extent specific objectives were met.

A previous study, which aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of this companionship program, indicated that it helped 15 out of 20 students to pursue their studies and 4 students to obtain their diploma (Phillion et al., 2010). It does not, however, elucidate how the companionship process satisfied the students' experience and needs. In view of that, our analysis aimed to take a deeper look at the companionship process from the perspective of probationary students and that of professional resource personnel.

Academic Companion's Role

Discussions with the students and the professional resource persons concerned the three parties' perception of the role of the academic companion through the program. This helps further define the process of companionship and how it was experienced. Specifically, the practice of guidance and the importance of attending to the self-esteem and self-confidence of students who have experienced failure were highlighted.

Guidance.

The quality of the guidance offered through the companioning process emerged in the multiple sources of data. First, student viewpoint suggests that the companion's most evident task was academic monitoring, that is, observing the students' habits and study methods and helping them stay on target. Mark exemplified this thought:

Yeah, she provides support and encouragement. I think that the importance of the [companioning] program is to keep kids focused on what they're here to be doing, which is to learn. (...) I think that the program more than counseling students is just a constant reminder that yeah, you do have to put school first. I think that is great purpose.

In addition, Connie's ability to foster students' reflection on their own situation, needs, and solutions was mentioned and particularly appreciated by the students. For instance, Anny affirmed: "You do have to figure out for yourself but I think you need somebody that isn't that close to you to be able to guide you and ask the right questions." Anny, Manelle, and Leena also indicated that they needed a "reality check" in order to adjust their ways of doing in university. The companion's ability to foster reflection was important for them to gain some perspective and realign their ways of doing in university.

In this regard, it is interesting to introduce Connie's perspective on her own role as academic companion. She saw her role as that of a "pathfinder" helping students look into their daily reality to better appreciate their challenges and find their own solutions. "So let's see how you do things, and tell me why you [emphasis] think it's not working'. In her work as a companion she sought to understand the student's experience and guide their reflection with the purpose of adjusting the "how to" with new strategies.

Finally, we turn to Denise's vision of the companion's role as she developed the program. She specified that, for a successful academic companioning process, it was

important to help the students increase their awareness of their own needs as she explained here: “In academic companioning, it’s important to *do with*, as opposed to *do for*. If I can help my students become more reflective or metacognitive, I think I’ve done my job.” She called attention to the importance of promoting the students’ responsibility, as a key purpose of academic companioning is to offer a structure conducive to the students’ engagement in their own studies.

Confidence.

The interviews suggest that the companion’s role was eminently affective. To begin with, the students stories indicated that the companion created a positive ambiance and helped them tap into a confidence that had been shattered in many cases. It appears that this was crucial in the companioning process as it was emphasized by Mark:

I think Connie’s role was (pause) (...) in any situation she would put a smile on your face. She knows that no matter the situation, you can overcome it. You know, it’s hope (...) providing hope to those that feel like they’re not capable at that time. I think she knows that we’re capable, I think that all kids here probably do know that they’re capable but sometimes they just need to have that feeling of hope, you know, the feeling that things are gonna work out (...) we’re gonna succeed.

Manelle’s words indicate that her interactions with Connie helped her regain her motivation for studies after hardships she qualified as a burnout. “[Connie] gave me that extra little push, that motivation. (...) I was just getting back on my feet and it was really good for me to have that motivation (...) it really helped me.” Along the same lines, Eva explained that working with her companion reinvigorated her after experiencing repeated failure in university and feeling depressed. Evidently, this helped her commit to and persist in her studies:

I always looked forward to going (...) I just remember, every time I'd meet her I'd be so refreshed. I had a class right after and like I was always looking forward to go to that class (...) When I finished [the program] I knew I was more eager to continue [my studies].

The student viewpoint expressed above seems congruent with Connie's perspective on the students' experience of academic probation. In her view, the personal component was of foremost importance and often iterated that the role of a companion in the context of academic probation entailed addressing self-esteem and self-confidence:

I also think that, in many cases, the student's self-esteem is undermined following failures (...) So it was, for the majority of them, it was important to reassure them on their capacity to be successful in the university context and help them rebuild their confidence for the rest of her studies.

Similarly, the program developer recognized the adversity represented by academic probation. She highlighted that this experience was emotionally damaging, that it affected students' self-esteem and often times, their self-concept. Therefore, alike the companion, she supported the need to rebuild and reinforce students' self-esteem. She added, however, that students must also be able to adapt to the expectations of both the university and the workplace contexts: "We're doing them a favour by helping them recreate their self-esteem but at the same time, students who will be successful on the work market are those who are capable of adapting. We need to foster both aspects."

Catering to Students' Needs

Our analysis sheds light on how the studied process of academic companionship caters to the needs revealed by the participating students. Contrasting the student perspective, the companion's and program developer's views allow showcasing this adjustment process,

specifically with regards to the acknowledgement of their own needs, the familiarity with the university context, and personal support.

Acknowledgement of their own needs as students.

An abundance of literature on the theme of academic probation speaks of students' characteristics and shortfalls. Naturally, we expected students were aware of their needs. Paradoxically, when first asked about their needs, the students appeared unable to identify them. For instance, Anny confided: "I don't know that I needed anything more at the time." Through discussion and probing however, the students' needs became apparent. In concordance to what is highlighted in the literature, they were multiple and various. For instance, Eva shared:

I would've liked somebody, like a mentor, somebody to tell me like, this is what is expected of you. (...) I needed also for study habits and concentration, prioritizing my time, things like that. I knew how to manage in high school but now I need different things."

On his part, Mark struggled as he felt disconnected from his university. He stressed a dire need to fit in: "Didn't feel like I belonged, and it was that absolute, it was an overwhelming feeling that I needed to belong to something." Leena experienced obstacles regarding daily life and finances: "I was trying but, I had to work to afford tuition fees, books, I'm in the Department of Theatre so I had to go to plays (...) I was so tired, I burned myself out, I was exhausted."

The companion's perspective harmonizes with what was expressed in the student interviews. Reinforcing the idea that students often have difficulty articulating their needs, Connie discussed the importance of helping them elucidate these needs. She emphasized that, in the companioning process, she did not position herself as an expert but favored an approach wherein she supported students' acknowledgement and awareness of their situation

and needs: “I don’t think it is right to say ‘Listen, this is what I, the expert, have decided we will do.’ And anyway, in many cases, the issues to address change and evolve.” In line with what emerged from the student stories, Connie also specified that the students experience particular situations and therefore, the obstacles they face are unique and quite varied.

The program developer’s view further supplements these emerging ideas. Her interview stressed the variety and multiplicity of obstacles struggling students face. Discussing the sources of impediments they experience, she enumerated many types of hindrances that complicate the undergraduate course. However, she explained that it was crucial to the companionship process to support the students’ thought process with regard to their education and obstacles to their success: “ (...) again, it’s about helping him reflect about his own needs.”

Familiarity with the University Context.

The data analysis revealed that the students, before their participation in the program, needed to acquaint themselves with the expectations of higher education. Their stories indicate that university studies are radically different from their high school experience, and that they did not know what was expected of them in higher education or how to navigate the university context. Manelle’s words translate well the idea that there was a sizeable gap between high school and higher education experience: “I had it easy in high school. I expected more work [in university] but I didn’t think it was gonna crash down like this, that it would be so fast, so much, so intense.” In addition to the highly diverging modes of functioning in high school and in university, the participants’ lack of understanding of university culture and expectations was exemplified by Leena when asked about her appreciation of academic expectations: “I had no clue. It took me at least two years to figure it out. (...) My priority at that time was really to understand what was going on and try to

follow the rhythm.” It had been difficult for the students to navigate in a context where they felt they were expected to be self-sufficient, to fully integrate the university life, activities, and services, and to know the rules and conditions regulating their study process. Also, they did not grasp the requirements of a quality assignment or recognize what study habits were appropriate in higher education. They reported being uncomfortable and sometimes overwhelmed in a setting they characterized as impersonal and in which they had a lot of responsibilities and liberty.

Echoing the participants’ words, Connie suggested that it was essential for students to better grasp what was expected of them in university. “University is very different from high school. They have high expectations; spending two hours on a 12-page assignment is not enough, not in university. (...) In university, there are quite particular expectations, having good ideas is not sufficient anymore.” In light of this, an important component of her mission, as academic companion, was to help students learn about university level expectations so they could eventually satisfy them.

The program developer’s perspective also aligns with the students’ point of view. She suggests that the impersonal nature of a large university community and a lack of relational contact in a setting that rely more and more on web-based technologies influences students’ poor appreciation of university standards. She adds that students are used to operate in a highly structured high school system and often transition with difficulty to the university context where the organization, supervision, and expectations contrast with what they are accustomed to:

They’re just leaving high school, they’re a little bit lost, everything has always been decided for them, they’ve been in an overly structured setting all their life and now they find

themselves in a destabilizing context with little teaching or contact hours and a lot of work to accomplish.

An awareness of this challenging situation has led Denise to develop a program that was structured, with clear objectives, a personalized learning plan, designed activities, and one on one meetings with a companion in a collaborative process.

Personal Support.

The students' stories illustrate the physical and emotional distance that existed between their parents and them. For instance, Manelle expressed: "I was alone. (...) I don't see my parents often. (...) they're there in difficult moments but always at the end of the [telephone] line." Student stories indicated that they had distanced themselves with many childhood and high school friends by moving to a new city and focusing on their new lifestyle. They did meet fellow students in university but reported that these new acquaintances were not always significant and that in some cases they represented a distraction from studies when social life was prioritized. Concurrently, in the large university classes and impersonal setting, they experienced a rather detached contact with professors, which contrasted with the more involved relations they had described with high school teachers. Some students recounted that they sought to connect with university professors by discussing with them after class or during their office hours but they generally were not able to establish a satisfying rapport with them. Similarly, they generally did not obtain a meaningful form of support from university support staff as Eva described: "She [advisor at her faculty] told me what my options were. It was extremely impersonal. (...) I was afraid. (...) I wasn't asking for pity, I was just hoping for some support of some sort." It seems that a healthy supportive system was generally unavailable to them.

The companioning program personnel recognized the magnitude of the emotional needs normally fulfilled by family and friends. Connie reinforced the importance of the interpersonal dimension of her work with students. She believed the mutual connection and closeness between a resource person and student was central to the companioning process, and especially vital given the limited positive supportive relations from which the students benefited: “Companioning is a presence, someone who can hear things in a neutral zone (...) Often times, just naming a situation or problem the student struggles with is a form of liberation. (...) Companioning is above and beyond establishing a rapport with the other.”

Denise’s observations harmonize with the students’ stories. In her interview, she described a variety of relational issues experienced by probationary students justifying the importance attributed to the individualized and personalized feature of the companioning program. She was evocative in this regard:

For some of them, it’s a crisis; academic failure, breakups (...) pressure from peers, from family, competition with peers – to get into medicine for instance, financial problems – many students must work to provide for themselves, feeling isolated, a lack of emotional or cognitive resources (...) Much solitude (...) some students live away from their family, or have little support from their parents. (...) The parents, its not that they don’t want to help, they don’t necessarily know how to, many students live on their own, their parents are not present to help, to pay attention to what they’re doing.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the process of academic companioning as experienced by five undergraduate probationary students and as supported by professional resource personnel. We conducted multiple interviews (Seidman, 2006) with three parties involved in a companioning program and carried out a document analysis

(Salminen, et al., 2000) to better understand the values and objectives informing this program. This data was useful to ascertain the congruence of the conceptual foundation and implementation of the program with the needs and experiences of students participating in it.

An in-depth examination of the lived experience of academic probation and companionship, as called for (Glasser, 2009; Nance, 2007; Zuzelo, 2000), was achieved through a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space and its focus on temporal, social, and contextual dimensions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The methodology used allowed examining the meaning of a shared experience from multiple and emic perspectives. This fosters an understanding of the sense those involved with academic probation and companionship make of their own experience (Merriam, 2009).

The insiders' perspectives were evocative in detailing key factors in an experience of academic probation and companionship. Notably, the findings exceed the conventional bounds of the budding field of research on academic probation, which are generally limited to student characteristics, reasons leading to probation, and programs assisting probationary students.

Given its methodology and broadened findings, our examination allows making recommendations based on insights of those involved in a companionship process. The respondents in this investigation called attention to the program features that should be emphasized in the context of academic probation. Namely, the basic role of companionship should include a form of guidance that taps in the students' reflection with regards to their own academic situation, challenges, and potential solutions. Given the emotionally damaging outcome of academic probation, the companionship role should also address the affective quality of the experience.

Respondents also conveyed that the probationary students had to meet essential considerations. The three parties indicated the necessity for students to identify and acknowledge their needs in the university context, as these were generally not clear. The interviews also highlighted that the probationary students had difficulty adapting to the university context, as it largely differed from their high school setting. Finally, the students' stories draw attention to the distance that slowly embedded in their established relationships and the difficulty creating new ones in the university setting.

In the current bounded scope of research on academic probation, this article is a first step in mapping the experience of academic probation and companioning, from multiple and emic perspectives. It provides interesting insights on the companioning role and how the program catered to the students' needs. As a stepping stone in a developing field of research, this exploration fuels our curiosity about fruitful characteristics of the companion's role and approach, calling for an examination in greater detail the "how to" and "why" of academic companioning. In addition, it would be interesting to investigate diverse contexts. For instance, it would be profitable to examine the experience of academic probation and companioning in specific programs such as health sciences and medicine, engineering, education, and social sciences. It would also be of interest to investigate experience in collegiate, undergraduate and graduate programs. Finally, it would be valuable to conduct comparable studies in varied institutions in smaller cities and large metropolises, with a personalized atmosphere and large campus, in minority communities, and in various areas of the world.

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Manuscript 5 – “Creating a relationship” : The characteristics of a companioning relationship in the context of academic probation

Abstract

This qualitative study examined the characteristics of a fruitful helping relationship in the context of academic probation. Data was collected through multiple in-depth interviews and analyzed using a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, which provided a fitting framework for a thematic narrative analysis. A document analysis was also completed to determine the conceptual foundation of the academic companioning program. Supporting Dewey’s interaction principle, findings suggest that a rapport characterized by presence and trust and an approach promoting responsibility, awareness, and holism were key in this shared experience.

Keywords: Academic probation; Helping relationship; Deweyan theory of experience; Qualitative research; Thematic narrative analysis

In the fall 2007, the University of Ottawa put in place an innovative program aimed at assisting students on academic probation. More specifically, these students had been required to withdraw from their program of study due to unsatisfactory grade performance. Winning an appeal to their mandatory withdrawal however, they were allowed to continue their studies while receiving academic support through a program tailored to their needs.

Previous research evaluated the influence of this support program for students on the verge of dismissal. It indicated that the companioning program helped 15 out of 20 students to pursue their studies and 4 students to obtain their diploma. Another key finding of this study revealed that a central determinant motivating students' success in the program was a positive and stable relationship with a professional resource person. The relational dimension is deemed crucial as it stimulates students' engagement in the program and in their studies (Phillion, Bourassa, LeBlanc Plouffe, & Arcand, 2010). However, the investigation does not elucidate how and why this relationship was a decisive constituent of the process. To further our understanding of success factors of a program aimed at enhancing students' academic achievement, I sought to examine what characterizes a fruitful helping relationship between a student and resource person, and what form it takes in the context of academic probation. In this endeavour, I begin with a discussion of the notion of academic probation and academic assistance programs developed to assist probationary students.

Academic Probation

Much research has been done on the topic of academic attrition, which has been defined as the termination of student membership in post secondary institutions (Bean, 1980). A closer look at the circumstances of termination suggests an evocative distinction between students who voluntarily withdraw from their program of study and those who are dismissed (Tinto, 1975, 1987; Vaughan, 1968). This warrants a focus on a specific

population of students who are on the verge of dismissal, but who do not wish to withdraw from their program of studies, that is, probationary students.

In view of an insufficiently defined notion of academic probation, I have elsewhere proposed a definition based on key texts (Scarf, 1957; Smith & Winterbottom, 1970), which suggest that (a) students were put on academic probation when their grade performance is below a satisfactory threshold; (b) they could remain in their program of study but must increase their grades; and (c) they would be dismissed if they do not (Arcand & Leblanc, in press a). These elements of definition have yet to be examined and confirmed in order to provide a solid foundation for the burgeoning body of research on academic probation.

Much of the literature on academic probation centres on obstacles leading to underperformance (Arcand & Leblanc, in press b). Such impediments include a lack of essential study skills, strategies, tools, and motivation. Hindrances in the student's personal life are also mentioned such as employment obligations, home-related responsibilities, conflicting relationships, and health issues (Humphrey, 2005-2006; Kamphoff, Hutson, Amundsen, & Atwood, 2006-2007; Trombley, 2000-2001). Authors, however, have called for an in-depth consideration of student experience contrasting with the current focus on impairments (Ryan & Glenn, 2002-2003; Thomas, 2003; Vander Schee, 2007). This is particularly relevant seeing as professionals and practitioners are preoccupied with the experience of academic probation as lived by students (Glasser, 2009; Nance, 2007; Zuzelo, 2000).

Academic support

To cater the identified impairments leading to underperformance, most institutions of higher education offer assistance programs to provide probationary students with effective strategies to recover good academic standing. Seeing as there are no guidelines mandating

the development of probationary programs, they vary greatly in terms of structure, format, and theoretical foundation. For instance, support is offered through group workshop-based interventions (Coleman & Freedman, 1996; Humphrey, 2005-2006), individualized academic advising (Mann, Hunt, & Alford, 2003-2004; Newton, 1990) or combined forms of interventions (Kamphoff et al., 2006-2007; Tovar & Simon, 2006). Concurrently, some assistance programs emphasize learning skills while others focus on personal support. Finally, length and time commitment vary from one session to semester long interventions.

A major component of probationary programs is referred to as academic advising in U.S. literature. Three approaches of academic advising are prevalent, that is (a) prescriptive advising, an outcome-oriented course of action whereby the expert advisor pinpoints the needs of the student and proposes a plan of action (Molina & Abelman, 2000; Vander Schee, 2007); (b) developmental academic advising, a collaborative, process-oriented approach that aims to help the student develop holistically as an educated adult (Harrison, 2009; Vander Schee, 2007); and (c) intrusive advising, referred to as high involvement advising which, emphasizes the advisor – advisee relationship, proposes assistance activities on a regular basis, and seeks to foster student motivation and responsibility (Molina & Abelman, 2000; Vander Schee, 2007).

The francophone and European literature employ the expression of “*accompagnement scolaire*” to designate a similar process (Glasman, 2001; Romainville, 2000; Romainville & Noël, 1998). Literature on death and bereavement use the term and definition of *companioning* as a helping relationship that promotes being present to another person, respecting the person’s disorder or confusion, and listening with the heart (Wolfelt, 2004). In keeping with this, he proposes the term *companion* to describe the person who has the role of walking alongside, seeking to stir the other’s inner force and find new connections

in their world (Wolfelt, 2009). Believing this term translates justly the notion of “*accompagnement scolaire*”, I use the expressions *academic companioning* and *academic companion* in this text.

Epistemological Stance

In order to acquire knowledge about what characterizes a fruitful helping relationship, more specifically, a companioning relationship and what form it takes in the context of academic probation, I focused on the experience of students and professional resource personnel involved in the program. In so doing I wished to connect with the pedagogic issue shared by the students who struggle and the professionals who support them. I also sought to connect with the meaning of this issue for those involved (van Manen, 1997). Although little research has yet addressed this matter, I concur with Vander Schee (2007) in proposing that more attention and sound research must be devoted to understand students’ experiences of probation and support. In line with the movement of positive psychology, I believe that the area of research on academic probation will benefit from a focus on what allows students to grow, flourish, and engage in their academic project (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Dewey’s theory of experience has helped us make sense of what a fruitful companioning relationship means from the perspective of probationary students and professional resource personnel. Dewey, the philosopher and pedagogue, believed that everything a person acts upon and undergoes is an experience. It includes all that has meaning for the person, all that evokes emotions and attitudes (Dewey, 1958). He suggested that this influence is a function of the quality of the experience, which is based on two principles, interaction and continuity (1938/1997). First, the principle of interaction involves a belief that the person is in undivided unity with his environment and, therefore, is in

continual transaction with his social and physical environment. Second, the principle of continuity suggests that experience is cumulative, each experience having an influence on future ones and conversely, every new experience being shaped by past ones (Dewey, 1934/2005, 1938/1997). The individual derives meaning from this constant interaction with his surroundings. This construction of intellectual and emotional attitudes alters his perception of and rapport with the environment (Dewey, 1958). Experiences and their derived meaning, by fostering positive internal conditions, are believed to promote receptivity to further experiences and growth (Dewey, 1938/1997).

Methodological Procedures

Drawing on Dewey's work, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) proposed a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (interaction, continuity and situation), which have informed my analysis of the students' and professional resource personnel's storied experience (Clandinin & Murphy, 2007). The story is an essential medium through which the meaningfulness of an experience can be conveyed (Polkinghorne, 1983). Whether told to oneself or to others, the story is a fundamental type of data accounting for experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Appropriately, in this study, I have collected stories of experience and examined them through an analysis of narratives. A document analysis was also helpful to further an understanding of the research purpose. The data collection and analysis procedures are described below but first, I introduce the seven participants involved in this study.

Participants

Five students responded to an email invitation and completed the investigation in the fall 2008. They studied in diverse undergraduate programs in a large urban Canadian university. All students had entered university the year following their high school

graduation; four were between 20 and 22 years old and one did not disclose her age. Four participants were women and one was a man. Three were Anglophone and two were Francophone. Incidentally, the five students were Caucasians born in Canada. The pseudonyms Manelle, Eva, Mark, Leena and Anny were used in this manuscript to protect their anonymity.

The academic companion who worked with the students and the program developer received an email invitation and accepted to participate in this inquiry. Connie, the academic companion held a degree in counseling and psychopedagogy and had over 10 years experience as a learning specialist. She was chosen as the academic companion in this specific program for her extensive knowledge of the university setting, her understanding of the variety and uniqueness of struggles students face, and her expertise in study skills and strategies. Denise, the program developer had a strong background in special education. As a learning specialist she had worked in the field of academic support and learning in higher education for over 15 years. She also conducted research on academic attrition and retention. Her extensive field and research experience led her to envision and develop an academic companioning program aimed at supporting students facing mandatory withdrawal.

Qualitative Interviewing

Core data of this study emerged through Seidman's (2006) phenomenological approach to interviewing, an in-depth methodology that seeks to appreciate the respondents' lived experiences and their meaning (van Manen, 1997). This three-interview structure, conducted with each student, sought to uncover details of early experiences, understand current experiences, and consider the meaning attributed to them in the form of thoughts, beliefs, and feelings. This data allowed us to examine the students' experience with academic probation, the companioning program, and the rapport with their companion. These

interviews took the form of semi-structured, individual, face-to-face conversations that lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. One more vocal respondent required a fourth interview to complete his life story.

The two single interviews with key personnel involved in the support program allowed us to consider a practitioner and an administrative perspective on academic probation. These discussions were semi-structured, individual, face-to-face and lasted roughly 60 minutes. They occurred in French and quotes used here were translated and authenticated by the respondents.

Data emerging from a total of 18 interviews with 7 respondents were examined in view of Riessman's (2008) thematic narrative analysis, which focuses on the content of storied accounts to uncover and thematically categorize experience. The transcribed student stories and the two single interviews were imported in the Nvivo 8 software (QSR International, 2007) to map the shared experience. Interview segments that were particularly eloquent or recurring were classified into key themes. All three perspective were integrated in the same coding scheme but were distinguished in the interpretation phase as called for by the research purpose.

Document Analysis

To further enhance my understanding of the probationary experience and locate the experience in context, I conducted a document analysis to delimit the companioning program's objectives and conceptual foundation in accordance to the research purpose (Salminen, Lyytikäinen, & Tiitinen, 2000). Documents including (a) the university support services' web page, (b) a research proposal describing the rationale behind the development and implementation of the companioning program, (c) the program's logic model, and (d) a published article reporting on the effectiveness of the program were carefully reviewed to

uncover the posture, philosophy, and values guiding the program. This data provided context as well as an additional layer of meaning concerning the creation of a fruitful rapport as intended in the realization of the companionship program in which the participants were involved.

Findings

This qualitative study examined what characterizes a fruitful companionship relationship in the context of academic probation. First, making use of the interview with the program developer and the document analysis, I examine the companionship program as it was envisioned and intended. Following this, I analyze the shared experience of companionship based on the interviews with the students and with the companion.

Academic Companionship Program – A Vision

This first section of findings is based on the interview with the program developer and the document analysis. It reports my interpretation of key elements in the lived experience of the companionship program complemented by excerpts from the program developer's perspective.

The academic companionship program originated from a sincere desire to support students who risk compulsory withdrawal but wish to pursue and complete their studies. Denise, the program developer expressed in those terms the intent that led to the implementation of the companionship program:

There is a lot of discussion about the social costs of academic attrition. That's one thing, but there is also an emotional cost. There is an individual cost in not obtaining a diploma. (...) I'm a learning specialist and I work with students with learning disabilities, and I always wondered about the students who are at risk, those we forget, who slip through the cracks, I wanted to dedicate my attention to them too.

This interest led Denise to gather a team and the resources to develop an academic companionship program that offered support for one term. When asked what was central to the companionship process, she unquestionably put the relational aspect at the forefront:

Creating a relationship... creating a relationship. Students come back, not because you have done much with them, but because you have listened to them, you took the time, you created a relationship. They became important. (...) Students want contact, they want to be recognized. This is what being valued as a person is.

The program's objective was to facilitate the student's short- and long-term academic success by focusing on five broad dimensions of academic success. These included (a) defining or refining academic and/or professional goals, (b) developing essential learning strategies, (c) enhancing course content knowledge, (d) improving writing skills, and (e) examining personal challenges. Through a collaborative companionship process, the student and the academic companion worked together to uncover the student's needs and develop a personalized and structured learning plan. This plan was aligned to the broad dimensions, however, the individualized aspect of the program was crucial in the companionship process as highlighted by Denise when she said:

I take on a journey with each student I meet. (...) I listen to the student and follow his lead but I also aim to help him focus on his learning situation, the challenges he faces, and what he is willing to do to meet his goals.

The students' university experience was the focus of the intervention. In line with reviewed literature on academic companionship, the program was structured to support the students, but also prompt them to take ownership of their academic progress. The form of assistance and activities used aimed to make them reflect and enhance their awareness about their situation, practices, and needs. It was hoped that this would help the students take

matters into their own hands and expand their development of strategies to foster their own success. The program developer became animated as she explained: “It is a shared responsibility. Of course, I will be there but I will not be leading, I will not be following, I’ll be right there beside him.”

It was believed that helping students develop their sense of responsibility would help them better navigate the academic world and foster their success. The program sought to help students become more independent, and soar on their own wings. For example, it was hoped that they would recognize their needs and take advantage of the multitude of support services offered to them on campus.

Various tools were used within the program to optimally support the students. A first individual semi-structured interview voiced the student’s university experience and contrasted it to his previous school experience. A second individual meeting used a reflective tool called the Socratic Wheel and helped the student clarify their learning needs and goals with regards to the five above-mentioned dimensions of academic success. These two complementary interviews informed the development of an individualized and flexible learning plan that launched the intervention. In addition, throughout the intervention, the student was encouraged to keep a weekly reflective journal on his progression and experience. Lastly, a final interview re-examined the student’s initial learning plan and assess whether it remained relevant for him and to what extent specific objectives were met.

The document analysis and interview with the program developer reveal the parameters of the program and the philosophy guiding its implementation. Although the intervention was guided by five broad dimensions, the structure of the program was clearly centred on the student. Furthermore, it is evident that the student – companion relationship is vital to companionship. Such elements help contextualize the experience lived by the students

and the resource person in the companionship process.

Academic Companionship – A Shared Experience

The relational dimension of the shared companionship experience was discussed at length by the respondents. A thematic analysis of the sixteen interviews with the students and one with the companion distinguished two themes and five categories characterizing the student – companion relationship. I named them according to the terminology used by the respondents. My proposed interpretation is offered below, together with relevant quotes that showcase the participants' perspective.

Rapport.

In the next pages, I elucidate the nature and development of rapport as perceived by the respondents engaged in it. Specifically, the thematic narrative analysis suggests that presence and trust were key qualities of their companionship relationship.

Presence.

A first element defining the rapport between the students and the academic companion was the resource person's ability to be fully 'there' for the student. The companion's presence and student-centred style were frequently raised in interviews with the students. Mark noted his companion's noticeable warmth and focus and was impressed by these qualities:

She's a really [emphasis] caring person. Really caring person. (...) Like, she's a very, very warm person (...) When she's with you, she's really with you, you know.

You're the focus of her attention (...) The second I met Connie, she's great, I wanted to do it, I had no problem with being in that program.

For Eva, this presence was particularly important at a time she lacked personal support from family and friends. She noted her gratitude for being listened to through the struggles she

was experiencing in academic and personal contexts:

When I was telling her stories about my family or something, she'd always remember. She remembered the details (...) Just in general, I appreciated being able to go and talk to her. I liked how she set aside time at the end of each session to just talk with me.

Being present in this process also meant being able to adapt to the student's specific situation. The students mentioned the companion's flexibility and capacity to adjust the intervention to their needs. For instance, Anny indicated that Connie was able to adapt to her particular situation as a student in her final year of study: "My situation was different (...) and she recognized that. She did see that it wasn't what I needed so she adjusted, like we didn't meet for an hour every week cause it wasn't realistic."

In addition to listening skills and focused attention, Connie's commitment to the program was emphasized by the students. The extra steps she took in her daily work were valued. Eva was most vocal in this regard:

I really appreciated how much dedication Connie had to each student. You could just tell by the way she talked about the program. I appreciated how much effort she put into it. (...) She'd email me in her spare time (...) It showed me that she put a lot of extra thought into her work. And I appreciated that.

The companion's viewpoint corresponds to the impressions expressed by the students. Her idea of academic companioning is "a presence, someone who can hear things in a neutral zone." Her concept of presence was elicited in the interview. For one thing, she communicated on many occasions that her work was centred on the student's needs and goals: "Of course, you take them where they are. Before I meet them, I never have in mind, 'You have to do A, B, C' (...) We take them as they are, where they are."

Her discourse clearly translated the importance she attributed to being flexible and focused on the student in her work: “Some [students] were very talkative and had a lot to say but others were more reserved. So I work with this openness, the openness on the other end, to figure out our course of action.”

Trust.

Trust arose as an important component in the companioning experience and the development of rapport. Students discussed the tone of their meetings with their companion, calling attention to agreeableness and comfort, which enticed them to speak openly about their experience. Eva’s discourse is revealing: “We had wonderful conversations. I felt comfortable talking to her. (...) She always had an open mind about everything (...) Yeah, and she made it easy for me to open up. I was just comfortable.”

Students also indicated the significance of this ease with the companion. As Leena plainly stated, she valued the closeness with a trusting professional. This interaction occurred at a time she struggled to improve her academic performance and remain in her program of study: “On the emotional level Connie really was someone I could trust, and I was able to talk to her a lot, with everything that was going on.”

Connie’s respectful and non-judgmental attitude was key in arousing the student’s trust in her. They often mentioned her open mindedness, receptivity, and understanding, which enhanced their comfort to discuss and disclose with her. Manelle believed his contributed to the success of her companioning experience: “I found [Connie] very warm, and friendly. It was easy to talk to her. (...) If I hadn’t been able to tell her how I felt, I don’t think it [the companioning process] would have worked as well.”

In addition, students highlighted Connie’s competence as an important element of trust. Acknowledging that their companion was knowledgeable about their specific

university setting, academic probation, and tools and strategies to support them inspired trust. When asked if he trusted that Connie was knowledgeable in her field, Mark answered: “She is. There’s no question. There’s no question. And she doesn’t use that intelligence in an overpowering way, demeaning way. It’s always very subtle and helpful.”

The companion’s perspective harmonized with that of the students. She proposed that a rapport of trust is the foundation of a successful helping relationship. She explained: “If you don’t have a trusting rapport with the person, no matter the quality of the strategies and psychopedagogic tools you have to offer, you won’t accomplish much. First there must be that trusting rapport.”

In this relationship, trust was bi-directional. On the one hand, Connie sought to gain the students’ trust by respecting their experience and being prepared and knowledgeable as a companion. On the other hand, she genuinely believed in the students’ ability to be successful in the university setting and she did not hesitate to share this impression with them: “They all are intelligent people, clearly; otherwise they would not have been admitted in university. I tell them repeatedly, ‘If you’re here, it is because you have the abilities, you can achieve this.’ ”

Both parties highlighted the importance of presence and trust in the companioning process and relationship, suggesting it is a core positive element. Specifically, the ability to be fully there, the pleasantness of the interaction, the non-judgemental attitude, as well as the companion’s comprehensive knowledge was emphasized in the interviews. Features of presence and trust created a relationship that valued and focused on the student as a person. This was also stressed by the program developer’s vision.

Approach.

The data analysis revealed that an approach promoting responsibility, enhancing

awareness, and considering the students experience in a holistic way was vital to the companioning process.

Responsibility.

Triggering the students' sense of responsibility emerged as a consequential feature of the approach that defined companioning relationship. External monitoring was a first step in helping students take charge of their academic projects. The structure of the program, and specifically the companion's support and encouragement reinforced the importance of routine in their daily activities as Manelle shared:

I liked that it was once a week. That was great (...) It opens your eyes to what's going on so you can't help seeing 'Ok, I have this assignment to do, this to organize, this, and that. If it was just once a month it would be like 'I'll do it later.' So it kept you organized and up to date.

It appears however that Connie's presence accomplished more than simple monitoring. The notion that someone was aware of their progress prompted a feeling of accountability in students. Furthermore, seeing that someone cared about their work and success, had the effect of kindling their motivation and engagement in their academic projects. Mark was eloquent on this matter and became energetic as he explained why it was significant.

I felt, I don't know, it made me want to do well, you know.

Interviewer: Ok. What was it that made you want to do well?

You know, where I was in my life is important but you want to do better when you know people are watching. And when you know that they have expectations for you, and especially when you know you can do it, you know. So I knew I could do it, I wanted to do, and I knew that I had people expecting me to do well. And so, those

three things together kinda kicked me in gear.

Students benefited from a great deal of support during their participation in the companioning program. Their weekly meetings kept them focused on academic endeavours. Regular contact with the companion enhanced their sense of responsibility and ownership of their progress. They recognized that it was imperative for them to develop their independence in the academic setting and appreciated the importance of applying the lessons learned through the program to function autonomously. This evidently tapped into their motivation and commitment to their academic progress as Eva expressed:

Even though I did miss it [the program], I don't think that it's something I should depend on. (...) I think she wanted the students to be able to, once they're done, to learn from it and keep moving. Without having to depend on somebody else.

This being said, the termination of the program was perceived as abrupt by some students for whom withdrawal of support was challenging. They expressed that the sharp ending after a four-month period of high support was unsettling, even if anticipated. On that topic Eva revealed:

I was upset when it ended (...) I was upset because I considered her as an advisor, as a mentor, and I knew that I would be able to continue on my own but I liked her advice and that extra push. It was really helpful (...) I was receiving so much help and, like, mentally it was helping me so much too. And then it just abruptly ended just before Christmas.

Connie's viewpoint echoes Eva's understanding of the life of the student – companion relationship and its course of detachment. Although students received a high level of support for four months, the program was operationalized with the purpose to foster their independence. Support was regular and highly involved but as a companion, Connie

kept in mind the program's ultimate objective of cultivating students' independence as she explained:

Our philosophy has always been fostering student autonomy. Our view is not to support indefinitely, which might create dependence. We're here to help them get out of a tangle and we want to see them evolve and become self-reliant as quickly as possible.

Connie did not position herself as an expert and did not believe in prescription. In agreement with her companioning style, which centred on the student, she preferred to give them space and time to explore their experience, needs, and preferred ways to address them.

We are talking about young adults (...) who need to be exposed to different options but we must let them choose. And as I tell them 'I don't have the solutions, you have your [emphasis] solutions. So let's try to see what is happening with you and decide what would be most appropriate.'

Awareness.

A second category describing the approach that influenced the companioning relationship pertained to awareness. The format and activities of the program promoted the students' ability to reflect and enhance their awareness of their academic condition, their habits, and potential new ways of doing in university. For instance, it was quite clear for Anny that she needed a "reality check" through her companioning process. The companion's ability to foster her reflection was important for her to gain some perspective on a situation that had become blurry. When asked what qualities she sought in a companion she explained:

I needed somebody to just tell me how it is and like strait up, not say 'Well you figure it out for yourself' kinda thing. I mean, you do have to figure it out for yourself but I think you need somebody that isn't that close to you to be able to guide you and ask

the right questions.

Students appreciated the reflective activities integrated in the structure of the program. They indicated that they did not previously use reflection in a systematic way in their daily academic occupations. It was an important aspect of the program, which was valued for its immediate “therapeutic” effect as well as its benefits. Anny expressively explained how she involved herself in reflection with the help of Connie who probed her thinking during the Socratic Wheel activity:

I think, for the first time, I had to do a goals chart, things you were trying to do and accomplish, and actually put it down in words (...) So I was able to answer questions on what I wanted to do. (...)

Interviewer: So was that helpful for you?

I think so. Forcing you to sit, and face it, and discuss it, and put it into words, and make it a reality.

In the same line of thought, Mark specified that he used his reflective journal seriously, enjoyed it, and drew important lessons from it as he shared here:

So when I reflected and saw ‘Yeah, I wrote two tests this week and I studied for 10 hours (...) And it’s like man! It was a little more work but I felt a lot better at the end of the week. So I’m gonna keep doing that you know.

Connie’s perspective further illustrates how the awareness component of the program shaped the relationship. Her philosophy, in line with the program’s format fostered the students’ reflection and observation of their ways of doing in the university context. Having observed that many students do not know how they learn best or how they can be most efficient, she described her role as a pathfinder, someone who helps shed light on a situation that may be hazy. In the excerpt below, she explains why enhancing awareness was a

necessary step for many students:

To help them take a step forward, help them see a little farther than they can perceive at that point in time. Propose tools, strategies, tips, after having identified what they believed was problematic for them with regards to learning, because we were interested in what they [emphasis] thought was challenging, why they thought it wasn't working out.

The findings presented here suggest that the companioning relationship, informed by the program's posture, promoted students' reflection, awareness and sense of responsibility. This was deemed central as it was believed it would contribute to the students' independence and help them better navigate the academic world. The analysis indicates however, that the conclusion of the program left them craving the companion's support, which suggests that they did not accomplish a sense of independence through the intervention. To cater this shortcoming, a progressive termination might help transition to a state of independence.

Holistic approach.

A last thematic category emerging from the narrative analysis suggests that the holistic approach of the program also defined the companioning relationship. As stated earlier, five broad dimensions pertaining to (a) academic or professional goals, (b) learning strategies, (c) knowledge of course topic, (d) writing skills, and (e) personal challenges guided the probationary program. The first four goals were academically related whereas the fifth opened up to other aspects of the student's life, thus making the intervention more comprehensive.

Naturally, the students discussed academic related issues and how the companioning program targeted their needs in this regard. However, they also named various challenges that exceeded the education context but manifestly affected their academic performance.

Opening up to the student's personal life allowed Connie to be in tune with their experience and tailor the intervention to their needs. Embracing the personal dimension and recognizing the uniqueness of each person's story helped individualize the support as illustrated by Mark and the interviewer:

We talked a lot about what was happening in just personal life, you know. My biggest thing last year was finance, you know. (...)

Interviewer: So Connie understood that and offered you personalized support?

Absolutely, that's a good way of putting it.

The companion's openness to discuss challenges in personal life was of utmost support to the students. For most of them, participation in the program coincided with a budding social system in a host city. Insufficient personal support combined with a transition to university studies, which normally brings life changes likely enhanced the students' need to address personal issues with a trusting companion. This was key for Eva, who was physically and emotionally distant from her family:

I remember I was having problems with my roommate at some point and she [Connie] helped me out with that as well. Yeah, and it was something that I really needed cause I couldn't, I had never spoken to anybody else about it.

Connie offered support in a variety of areas from relaxation to memorization to essay writing. She knew and introduced the plethora of campus services to students, she was qualified to offer counseling on personal issues, and had a wide-range of skills and competencies to approach companioning with a holistic outlook. Her ability to consider the person as a whole generated familiarity much appreciated by most students as Leena persuasively exemplified:

My academic companion really helped me a lot (...) You would get in her office and,

she's just like your favourite aunt you haven't seen in while. She was too good, the atmosphere she created, the energy she had (...)

Interviewer: It sounds like she has been important to you.

Really important [emphasis].

Although the comprehensive nature of the program was generally well received and valued by most students, it is important to mention that they do not all have the same level of readiness to connect personal matters to the process. Explicitly, Anny indicated that she did not wish to establish closeness with her companion and preferred to maintain her privacy: "I definitely think it helps to have some sort of connection with [the academic companion]. But I didn't have the desire to tell her things about me, so." In this regard, Connie explained that she respects students' (un)willingness to engage in discussion regarding their personal life but sustains her efforts to build a bridge and establish rapport.

Connie stressed the importance of being open to the personal dimension of students' life in the intervention. Her use of the term holistic to describe her companioning philosophy and the tone of her discourse suggest that she embraces a broad approach in her work with students, addressing their general experience, not only their academic practices or performance.

Companioning is about giving the opportunity to discuss what's going on in their everyday life, in relation to university but also their personal life. For some it is more important than others. Personally I think every major aspect of someone's life has an influence on their success or failure in university (...) I think it's important to consider all elements in a holistic manner.

She evocatively explained why, in her view, students benefit from addressing the personal component of their life. She believed the emotional and psychological components

of the student experience favoured university success. She shared, for instance:

I was open to the emotional and psychological aspects. When there is a thorn in the base of the morale or emotion, the rest is a little twisted and crooked. Often times when you remove that thorn, things go back to a state of balance, a little like a mobile of which you have pulled one string. When you let the string go, everything slowly goes back to a natural equilibrium.

The integration of personal challenges in the program's structure facilitated the personalized and comprehensive nature of the support offered and was appreciated by all but one student who did not seek familiarity with her companion. My analysis suggests that a holistic approach is a strong foundation for a companioning program.

Discussion and Conclusion

A previous study highlighted that the relational dimension was a key component of a companioning process but did not elucidate how, and why this dynamic was decisive (Phillion et al., 2010). In view of this gap, the current analysis took a deeper look at the companioning process to better understand what characterizes a fruitful companioning relationship and what form it takes in the context of academic probation. A document analysis and 18 qualitative in-depth interviews with 7 respondents were analyzed to gather three perspectives (i.e., probationary students', academic companion's, and program developer's) of a shared experience of a profitable companioning relationship. The nature and significance of the relationship and the meaningful role it played in the companioning process was recurrent and emphasized in the multiple interviews and documents analyzed.

A focus on the lived, shared, and storied experience of the students and companion as well as the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) allowed an in-depth exploration of a companioning relationship. In line with the Deweyan principle

of interaction (Dewey, 1934/2005, 1938/1997, 1958), the perspectives examined were evocative in depicting the nature and quality of the companionship relationship. The transactions between the students and the academic companion were conducive to growth in the sense that they promoted students' receptivity and fostered future rich experiences in the form of engagement and motivation.

This analysis indicates that the perspectives of the students, the companion, and the program developer blended well. The three perspectives complement one another in defining a successful companionship relationship. Firstly, presence and trust typified the rapport between the students and companion. The program emphasized the value of the companion's ability to be "fully there" in her work with students. Also, given the impending mandatory withdrawal combined with an often-unsettling sense of self in probationary students, fostering a rapport of trust should be a core aim of the companion. Presence and trust are often stated as key components of a helping relationship. Wolfelt's (2004, 2009) conceptualization of companionship advocates walking together with, listening with the heart, being present to the other, and respecting the person's disorder or confusion. Furthermore, Rogers' view of the helping relationship as a central source of change has inspired the notion of companionship (Le Bouëdec & Pasquier, 2001; Paul, 2004). He promoted the development of a climate of mutual trust and advocated that warmth and the safety of being accepted as a person generated the client's comfort to explore the peculiarities of his life (Rogers, 1961/1995). Unconditional positive attitude, genuineness, and empathetic understanding are key features of this relationship (Rogers, 1980/1995). Much like the vision of the program developer and the shared experience expressed by the students and companion, these qualities of a relationship promote growth and constructive personal development.

Secondly, the findings exemplify that the program's and the companion's philosophy

geared at fostering the student's awareness and sense of responsibility of his academic progress also shaped the helping relationship. The French literature on "accompagnement scolaire" advocates practices of doing *with* rather than doing *for* in seeking to help the student take ownership of his education. This literature also promotes student's understanding of his learning style and study methods, and favours reflection and regulation of his own habits and strategies (Glasman, 2001). Again, authors underline Rogers' influence on companioning (Le Bouëdec & Pasquier, 2001; Paul, 2004), emphasizing that the individual has the resources to understand himself, grow, and change (Rogers, 1961/1995). Correspondingly, the findings of this study suggest that an approach centred on the student fosters adequate functioning and autonomy, given proper climate and attitude.

Finally, the data support a holistic stance. The structure of the companioning program agrees with literature favouring a comprehensive approach to companioning with consideration of academic as well as non-academic factors to foster the student's physical, psychological and social well-being as well as his full academic potential (Morel, 2004; Pasquier, 2001). This analysis illustrates that being open to the emotional dimension was warranted in the companioning relationship. In effect, recognizing and managing emotion and cognition has been associated to a satisfying life and constructive habits (Kirschenbaum & Henderson, 1989; Rogers, 1961/1995). Arguably, such a focus on the person as a whole facilitates an understanding of the meaning held by the student, which is central to the relationship and process of helping.

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Chapter 6 : Discussion

The discussion that follows begins with a recapitulation of the key components of the study. A confessional tale exposing the research course highlights my experience as a second element of discussion. Finally, I summarise the main findings and discuss their significance in my institutional context.

Key components

Numerous students are placed on academic probation each year. Despite the impending possibility of being mandatorily withdrawn from their program of study many remain registered as they wish to complete their studies. In my doctoral project, I met and listened to the stories of five students who had been required to withdraw from their program of study but won an appeal to remain registered in university and improve their standing. I also met two professional resource persons who shared their perspective on academic probation. In this qualitative in-depth study, I investigated the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship in order to attain an improved academic standing. I collected and analyzed students' past and current stories as well as the meaning ascribed to the conditions and experience they underwent. To complement this data, I also interviewed a program developer and an academic companion to gather their impressions, I conducted a document analysis and kept a researcher journal.

Given the value and benefits of post-secondary education, I wanted to know more about the personal experience of students who faced academic probation. I set out on a mission to investigate conditions and experience from an insider's perspective. The theoretical framework underlying the investigation focused mainly on Dewey's notion of growth, his principles of interaction and continuity as well as the quality of experience. This

frame situates the student in context, showcases the role and process of personal meaning-making, recognizes the importance of perception and meaning derived from experience, and illustrates how certain experience promotes growth.

Confessional Tale

To further contextualize the discussion of this study I pondered upon my own experience of the investigation process. Conducting qualitative research is messy business (Sparkes, 2002). The product of research may take the form of a tidy dissertation shaped by a solid logical thread, but the process is often disordered and puzzling. In my case, it has been enjoyable but it was also punctuated by uncertainties, confusion, and at times, chaos. Sparkes highlights the interest of “confessional tales” in which researchers disclose a reality that is generally hidden behind “cleaned up” research reports (p. 51).

In the process of this study, I encountered a number of difficulties. The researcher journal helped me keep track of the complexities and discomfort experienced through the research. Early in the process I noted an uneasiness with Seidman’s protocol as the proposed methodology did not always flow efficiently. Aware of Seidman’s acknowledgement that “there are no absolutes in the world of interviewing” (p. 22) I opted to follow a course of discussion that seemed more natural for the participants and myself. That is, when the meaning of events arose in the conversation, I let the participant address it instead of keeping a rigid structure discussing meaning in a separate, third interview. I did so with the five participating students. Before coming to terms with this, I talked through possibilities to handle this issue with my advisor and other colleagues before taking action. In the end, what was important was to follow the flow of conversations with the participants while respecting Seidman’s appreciation of stories and remaining flexible in the research process to welcome and foster new understanding and insights (Huberman & Miles, 2002).

In addition to this, through the course of this project, I somehow lost contact with the all-important “So what?” of the research. I had busied myself with transcription, coding, reading, re-reading, writing, revising and had distanced myself from my research interest and purpose. I had also disconnected my voice (or perhaps myself?) from the product of the research. As a result I had produced a rather detached and technical document that did not represent who I am as a researcher. Owing to the thesis committee component of the graduate research process, an insightful discussion with the members of my internal committee helped me recognize and address this. With their help I was able to create a dissertation that is more reflective of the research process I had involved myself in.

Finally, I chose to write this dissertation in a manuscript format and believe it was the best road to travel. However, it represented challenge. It was imperative that the articles logically stand on their own to provide distinct contribution and that they collectively form a coherent and cohesive dissertation. In addition, it was vital that all sources of data be exploited but not repeated in the manuscripts. Adding to this, I wanted to examine the data in-depth and interpret them in view of well-defined literature and theoretical framework, while respecting author guidelines and word limits of scholarly journals for which they were destined. Finally, the thesis was a living composition that evolved with my discussions and further readings and it was important that the dissertation as well as each manuscript reflect this evolving thought. The chosen format thus required a high level of organization, thoughtfulness, and creativity to craft a tightly knit dissertation comprising five complementary and distinct manuscripts.

Key Findings Revisited

Five texts were composed, each seeking to reduce gaps and weaknesses in the literature on academic probation. The first and second texts present life story profiles of

probationary students (Seidman, 2006) in light of a theoretical framework grounded in Dewey's theory of experience (1958, 1938/1997, 1934/2005). The richness and complexity of the students' unique experience were highlighted whereas much of the literature tends to oversimplify students' experience by focusing on impediments and deficiencies often presented as commonalities.

These two texts align with Humphrey's call to action in "dispelling the notion that all probationary students are the same, they must be lazy, and they do not care" (2005-2006, p. 152). Rather than accepting this simplistic notion, this dissertation vividly illustrates transactions in the university context that potentially hindered students' possibilities of having rich future experiences and further learning by producing a lack of responsiveness. The analysis also reveals pleasant and reassuring transactions that fostered positive internal conditions conducive to growth (Dewey, 1938/1997). In this study, such agreeable conditions and experience are mostly related to participation in the ACP. Optimistically, students' involvement in the program generated new ways of coping with the environment and altered the nature of their experience with university life (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Dewey, 1958, 1938/1997, 1934/2005).

The profiles also illustrate the proposition that experience influences the construction of intellectual and emotional attitudes altering the individual's perception of and rapport with the environment (Dewey, 1958). The stories report pivotal experiences, many associated to the ACP, which helped the students to develop attitudes and practices to manage future situations productively. The analysis shows that the students' choices and actions were shaped by past experience and linked to a purpose and to future experience enhancing growth (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

In addition to the profiles, three texts focused on thematic connections (Seidman, 2006) framed by Dewey's theory of experience (1958, 1938/1997). The third manuscript examined the collective experience of the probationary students and uncovered themes that were central to the probationary students' experience. The students' stories show that they resisted exploiting the assistance available to them and preferred to keep to themselves and handle things on their own. Literature proposes that students with moderate needs do seek help but those who most need it most refrain (Karabenick & Knapp, 1988). Factors believed to be at play in this phenomenon include self-esteem (Karabenick & Knapp, 1991), expectations of failure, attempts to protect one's self-worth, (Karabenick & Knapp, 1988) and the threat of stigmatization (Thomas, 2003). Students' accounts also illustrate the personal costs ensued by academic struggles and the probationary status. Being on probation appears to paralyze students academically (Glasser, 2009; Zuzelo, 2000) and pose a threat to their sense of self, well-being (Nance, 2007), and self-esteem (Dozot et al., 2009). Finally, the third manuscript strongly illustrates the students' determination to complete their undergraduate studies. Their stories testified to their commitment to invest time, resources, as well as physical and psychological energy to satisfy the demands of university, regardless of the obstacles they faced (Astin, 1999; Tinto, 1987, 2006-2007). The students' commitment to their studies is remarkable, particularly when considering the barriers and pressures on their self-esteem (Dozot et al., 2009) and well-being (Nance, 2007).

A fourth manuscript sought to explore the process of academic companionship as experienced by five undergraduate probationary students and as supported by professional resource personnel. The multiple insider perspectives of the students, companion, and program developer evocatively exposed important dimensions of academic probation and companionship. Specifically, respondents highlighted some program features that should be

emphasized in the context of academic probation. In line with the francophone literature on academic companionship, the basic role of the companion should include a style of guidance that seeks to foster students' reflection and address the affective quality of the experience (Lafortune & Martin, 2004; Lhotellier, 2007). In addition, the participants suggested that a probationary program should help students clarify their needs, foster their adaptation to the university context, and offer personalized support through a positive relationship. This is coherent with authors' assertions on academic companionship (Bourassa et al, 2010; Boutinet, 2007c; Pasquier, 2001).

Finally, a fifth manuscript was completed to follow up on the topic of the student – companion relationship. This final paper examined the characteristics of a helping relationship that was deemed successful in the context of academic probation (Phillion et al., 2010). Findings based on the multiple insider perspectives suggest that a rapport characterized by presence and trust as well as an approach promoting responsibility, consciousness, and holism were key in the shared experience. Presence and trust are seen as central to the companionship relationship (Le Bouëdec, 2001c; Paul, 2004; Perters et al., 2007). Mutual trust, warmth, unconditional positive regard, and the security of being accepted promote growth and constructive personal development (Le Bouëdec & Pasquier, 2001; Paul, 2004, Rogers, 1961/1995). In addition, the program's approach and companion's philosophy also shaped the relationship. The promotion of reflection fostering the student's understanding of his own learning style and study methods help him take ownership of his education (Boutinet, 2007c; Lafortune & Martin, 2004; Glasman, 2001). Autonomy occurs when the companioned person is provided with proper climate and tools (Le Bouëdec & Pasquier, 2001; Paul, 2004). Lastly, the companionship relationship was holistic in the sense that it was open to the student's academic and non-academic issues. In fact, recognizing and

managing emotion and cognition promotes physical, psychological, and social well-being (Morel, 2004; Pasquier, 2001).

Significance

Creating an expressive metaphor with the dangers of the London train platforms, Davis (2008) illustrates the importance for research to remain in contact with societal needs and the implications of research for educational practice.

‘Mind the gap’ provides a useful metaphor for thinking about the great divide between research and practice in education because it reminds us of how dangerous a lack of awareness about the ways research can (and should) influence the field can be (p. 19).

In full agreement and recognition that research can, and should understand and enrich life and social capacity (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC, 2010), I hereby outline the significance of my research on the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companioning. I do so, firstly, by integrating the findings of my investigation in the local institutional setting where it took place and secondly, by observing how these results apply to a larger educational community.

So what has this study uncovered with regards to the conditions and experience relating to academic probation? And what meaning do probationary students ascribe to these? Owing to the findings of this study, which exceeded the usual focus on student characteristics and commonalities I was able to draw interesting insights (Humphrey, 2005-2006; Hunziker, 1991). First, I chose a narrative approach calling for stories. Stories, which can be seen as the communication of experience, are infrequent in modern society. In fact, it is devalued as it competes with a content of information focus, which is readily understandable and verifiable (Haaland, 2004). However, the communication of experience

still has value in today's research field for its practical interests. In the current project, the in-depth presentation of profiles, particularly those of Mark and Manelle, are interesting as they put a human expression on the notion of academic probation. This is especially valuable in an institution that is committed to provide its students with an inspiring student experience (University of Ottawa, n.d., a).

The thematic connections shed light on the substantial emotional and psychological costs of academic probation. This contrasts with the rich experience U of O wishes to provide its students. As part of Destination 2020's first goal, the university plans to strengthen many elements impacting the students' experience, raise student awareness of the shared responsibility in their success and experience, and help them acquire the tools to grow as individuals and learners (University of Ottawa, n.d., a). The findings of this investigation support U of O's commitment to enhance student experience. It also exposes that considerable efforts will be required if an unparalleled, ever-improving university experience is to be provided to all students who are admitted in the institution, in accordance to the proposed values of equity in higher education (Ontario. Ministry of Education, 2009, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010).

I was sincerely amazed to discover the students' determination to complete their studies. It is valuable to acknowledge the willpower and the courage of those students in academic jeopardy as it allows the institution to build on the powers of a student body. Given their commitment, with appropriate support, the participating students were able to exert the necessary efforts to adjust to the demands of university. This again, suggests U of O's investment of resources to maintain and improve its variety of programs and to enliven the learning environment inside and outside the classroom, as put forward in Destination 2020, is commendable.

The students' reaction to campus services is perplexing. In spite of their pressing needs and the depth of their struggles, they kept away from the responsive and comprehensive assistance available to them. This being said, when they did obtain companionship as a condition to remain in their program of study, this experience helped them grow in the Deweyan sense. Acknowledging this opens the stage for dialogue regarding the form of monitoring that should occur in the university context and the potential for a compulsory component of assistance. Further discussion and creativity is in order to propose viable solutions given the missions and values mandating post-secondary education.

In inquiring about the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companionship, I stumbled upon another important question: What are the characteristics of a fruitful companionship relationship in the context of academic probation? To further clarify the significance of this study, we can turn to this research question that was added to the thesis as it emerged as central in this study. I must say I was sincerely captivated by the blossoming process and relationship with an academic companion, within stories that also exposed the students' discomfort through their university experience.

In a condition of vulnerability elicited through expectations of academic performance and requirement to meet minimum university standards, the five probationary students found themselves in need of companionship. Presence and trust, which emerged through the companion's ability to provide genuine attention, warmth, acceptance and unconditional positive regard in the students' experience, were emphasized in the stories. These features of the companionship relationship are a key source of transformation (Le Bouëdec & Pasquier, 2001; Paul, 2004). Conceivably, such environmental conditions and interactions stem in positive internal states that promote students' receptivity to further experiences and growth

(Dewey, 1938/1997). As highlighted in U of O's strategic plan (University of Ottawa, n.d. a) our institution is committed to increase student-professor interactions as a way to stimulate its learning environment. Destination 2020 does not expand on efficient relations, however, the results of this investigation might inform the type of rapport professors as well as university support personnel can develop to foster profitable relations with students.

Another notable finding regarded the process of companionship, which evidently sought to promote students' awareness and sense of responsibility of their academic project. Fostering reflection on and of the students' academic habits and strategies is a driving force for transformation (Boutinet, 2007c; Paul, 2004; Pasquier, 2001). An individual's acknowledgement of his own capacities allows him to exploit resources to realize his intent (Dewey, 1934/2005). Reiterating U of O's strategic goal to increase student-professor interactions, we would argue that the quality of these interactions and the climate in which they take shape is as important as their amount. The ACP conducted at U of O was a productive way in which the institution materialised its commitment to enhancing student experience. The findings of the current study are useful in determining the positive elements of an effective companionship relation that took shape in this program. A university environment prepared to create a positive climate capitalizing on students' sense of power and autonomy would make it a leading institution in terms of student experience.

Chapter 7 : Conclusion

The multiple and emic perspectives examined in this investigation foster a better understanding as it taps into the complexity, the detail, and the nuances of the conditions and experience undergone by students who were placed on academic probation and participated in academic companioning. Additional studies are needed, however, to increase our understanding of the conditions and experience undergone by students who are placed on academic probation in diverse regions, universities, and faculties to further support the efforts of practitioners assisting probationary students.

The depth, the qualitative nature and the multiple forms of data and analyses practiced in this research project provide an expanded view of the experience of academic probation. Given these features, I was able to illustrate how fragments of experience are embedded in one another, and in their surrounding environment. Owing to the methodology, I was also able to describe the quality of experience relating to probation as well as emotions and attitudes associated to it. Importantly the findings highlight what characterises the experience that may lead to growth by creating conditions wherein students develop physically, intellectually, or morally.

The probationary students' stories and the perspective of the academic companion and program developer showcased in this investigation help move away from a focus on characteristics and difficulties associated to probation. They also promote a proactive dialogue regarding help seeking, the psychological and emotional costs of academic probation, students' determination to successfully complete their studies, and the characteristics of a positive companioning relationship. Hopefully, these stories will foster a change in how probationary students are commonly perceived and attended to.

Aside from the local institutional commitment to student experience, the current provincial, national and even global contexts promote equity and access to higher education (Ontario. Ministry of Education, 2009; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010). Paradoxically however, young adults face pressure in relation to high performance expectations and an underlying social message that they must be self-reliant and self-determined in the fulfilment of their projects (Ehrenberg, 2009). In order to participate in real democratization of post-secondary education, institutions must attend to the integration of all students, notwithstanding their needs and differences (Philion, 2010). This study on student experience provides important lessons regarding ways to create a positive and constructive academic climate to enhance student experience inside and outside the classroom as promoted in U of O's vision (University of Ottawa, n.d. a). I will stress the importance of this by borrowing the words of our Vice-President Academic and Provost, Professor Detellier, in highlighting that "what students live in the classroom guides their perception of their university experience, and even of themselves" (Detellier, 2012, October, Trans.).

Final Comments

I wish to express my gratitude to the participants for accepting to experience this investigation with me and share their views on academic probation and companioning. Conveying the richness, complexity, and uniqueness of their experience, Mark, Mannelle, Eva, Leena, and Anny's stories along with the perspectives of Connie and Denise, present a timely contribution to the budding research on academic probation.

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Appendix A : Methodological components of current studies on academic probation

Study	Purpose	Tradition	Participants	Data / data collection tool(s)	Analysis
Balduf, 2009	“Answer the following research questions. To what factors did first-year college students at an elite university attribute their underachievement and what interventions or remediation did they feel might reverse that underachievement?.” (p. 279)	Qualitative	Seven freshmen students at an elite university who were on academic warning or probation	Online interviews	Coded for themes
Coleman & Freedman, 1996	“Examined the effects of a multicomponent, structured group intervention on the academic achievement of 78 male and 71 female students placed on academic probation.” (p. 631)	Quantitative	149 undergraduate, PS PS who completed treatment group (n=70) PS on control group (n=79)	GPAs and credit completed ratios at the end of current semester and following semester Academic status	Statistical analyses Comparisons of PS who completed the program to the control group (i.e., PS who did not complete the program)
Hildreth, 2006	“Determine if a brief, structured, group intervention had an effect on the future academic performance of a cohort of college	Quantitative and qualitative	Total of 782 students placed on disqualified-readmitted status in a cohort Participated in	Demographic and academic information GPAs, failed courses, repeated courses	Characteristics of sample (i.e., students placed on disqualified-readmitted status) Comparison between

Study	Purpose	Tradition	Participants	Data / data collection tool(s)	Analysis
	students academically disqualified and readmitted” (p. 10)		<p>an intervention (n=216; 8 to 9 participated in interviews)</p> <p>Did not participate in the intervention (rest of the sample; 8 to 9 participated in interviews)</p>	<p>Retention</p> <p>Focus group or individual interviews</p>	<p>intervention and non-intervention groups</p> <p>Creation of themes emerging from interview questions (treated in quantitative fashion, i.e., # of students who discussed a theme)</p>
Holland, 2005	“Examine the reasons that students provide regarding why they are on academic probation and the efficacy of discussing the family life cycle among this group.” (no page numbers on document)	The author announces a qualitative research	<p>Students who were on academic probation and participated in an academic success workshop</p> <p>16 participants</p>	<p>Survey form containing open and closed-ended questions on Demographic info</p> <p>Reasons why students believe they are in AP</p> <p>Reported mental health status</p>	Presentation of numbers and percentages of response categories reported by students
Hsieh et al., 2007	“Examine differences among goal orientation and self efficacy using two distinct student groups: college students in good academic standing and college students on	Quantitative	<p>112 Undergraduate Students</p> <p>AP (n=60)</p> <p>Good standing (n=52)</p>	Demographic information of the sample (ethnic background, gender, year of study, socio-economic status)	Statistical analysis Comparison between groups, correlations with self-efficacy and goal orientation

Study	Purpose	Tradition	Participants	Data / data collection tool(s)	Analysis
	academic probation” (p. 455)			2 questionnaires	
Humphrey, 2005-2006	Not clearly stated. Abstract states the following: “This article describes the program so institutions can consider its use in their efforts to address retention issues on their campus. Research that studies the program’s effectiveness is included” (p. 147)	First study Quantitative	PS who participated in a success program PS who did not participate in program n = undisclosed	Academic standing GPAs Retention rates 3 semesters later	Comparison of PS who completed the program with a control group (i.e., PS who did not complete the program)
		Second study Quantitative	PS who participated in a success program PS who did not participate in program n = undisclosed	Academic standing GPAs Retention rates 1 and 2 semesters later	Statistical analyses Comparison of PS who completed the program with a control group (i.e., PS who did not complete the program)
		Third study Quantitative	PS and program facilitators	Data collection is explained but analyses are not presented Attendance and completion of report sheets Facilitator training Mid-semester survey Final survey	Not presented

Study	Purpose	Tradition	Participants	Data / data collection tool(s)	Analysis
				# of PS visits with professors	
Hutson, 2006	"1) to describe the characteristics of college students who performed poorly enough to be placed on academic probation at UNCG; 2) to depict the impact of the SAS 100 program on probation students; 3) to measure the effectiveness of the SAS 100 program on student retention, student achievement, and student self-improvement." (p. 8)	Quantitative and qualitative	Students on academic probation who enrolled in program Quantitative data: n=279 Qualitative data; 23 volunteers	Quantitative data: Demographic information Predicted GPAs and GPAs 1 survey Qualitative data: Face to face interviews Journal entries	Quantitative: Descriptive analysis (Description of participants) Statistical analysis of survey data Qualitative: Verbal analysis ("method for quantifying the subjective or qualitative coding of the contexts of verbal utterances)
Isaak et al., 2006-2007	"Explored the difficulties that probationary students viewed as obstacles to their academic progress." (p. 171)	Quantitative	Students Participated in an intervention program (CRP) for probationary students (n = 150) Regularly matriculated students (n = 153)	1 checklist of problems developed by CRP staff 1 survey 1 reading test	Statistical analyses Comparing probationary students to regularly matriculated students Correlating probationary students' scores on the checklist and the survey

Study	Purpose	Tradition	Participants	Data / data collection tool(s)	Analysis
Jewell & Riddle, 2005	“Determine if a method advocated for use in evidence-based practice could be adapted for use in predicting probationary status for students in a program in allied health, specifically physical therapy.” (p. 17)	Quantitative	305 students accepted in master’s degree between 1995 and 2000 27% of them on academic probation	Demographic information of the sample GPA’s Graduate Record Examination scores	Statistical analysis to identify the variables that best predict probation status.
Kamphoff et al., 2006-2007	“Outlines a motivational/ empowerment model for students on academic probation (AP)” (p. 397) (Objectives of the program assessed is stated but the purpose of the study is not as clear)	Quantitative	Students enrolled in program (n=307) Control gr (n=80)	Demographic and academic information of the sample (gender, age, ethnic background, year of study, living arrangement, high school, GPA, SAT score, # of credit hours) Retention rates over time GPA’s for previous and current semester	Statistical analyses Comparison of pre and post-intervention GPA’s between groups
Lindo et al., 2010	“Estimate the causal impact of being placed on academic	Quantitative	8 cohorts of students who’s GPA is within 0.6 of their	Term registration status, GPA, academic	Statistical analyses to test the validity of the regression

Study	Purpose	Tradition	Participants	Data / data collection tool(s)	Analysis
	probation by exploiting the discontinuous nature of the policy in a regression discontinuity design.” (p. 95)		academic probation cutoff (n = 12, 530) 25% of them are on academic probation	standing, gender, age, first language, measure of high school performance.	discontinuity design and examine the effects of being on probation.
Lindsay, 2000	“Differentiate and evaluate various academic intervention methods used on college campuses in order to identify effective intervention characteristics and propose a compendium of best practices” (p. 7)		5 experts (i.e., program administrators)	Validation of instrument: Experts are invited to rate (likert scale) and comment on each question comprised in the interview guide	“Based on the review minor changes were made to the wording of questions”
			11 program administrators	Data collection: Semi-structured interviews	Content analysis and development of categories treated statistically (i.e., # of times a category was stated and % of rater agreement on categories)
Lipsky & Ender, 1990	“Examine the impact of a one-credit study skills course on the academic achievement and retention of second-semester freshmen probationary	Quantitative	PS Participated in study skills course (n= 95) Control group (n=259)	GPA Credit hours attempted and earned Retention rates	Statistical analyses Compared treatment and non-treatment groups One and two-year follow up

Study	Purpose	Tradition	Participants	Data / data collection tool(s)	Analysis
	students at a state-supported university.” (p. 8)				
Mann et al., 2003-2004	“Evaluate the effectiveness of the Monitored Probation program at Lamar University.” (p. 246)	Quantitative	92 freshmen students divided into 4 categories based on GPAs Low intervention (n=11) Medium intervention (n=17) High intervention (n=34) Control gr. (n=30)	Questionnaire GPA before and after intervention	Statistical analyses Comparison of GPS between groups and over time (i.e., 4 semesters) Comparison of questionnaire score between groups
Milligna, 2007	“Examine the effectiveness of a strengths-based study skills and strategies intervention program on the academic achievement among freshmen- and sophomore-level students on academic probation in their first year of	Quantitative	Undergraduate students on academic probation Treatment group (i.e., participated in strengths-based study skills; n=30) Control group (i.e., did not participate;	3 self-report measures GPAs	Descriptive statistics to provide student profiles Statistical analysis of pre and post test scores between groups Comparison of the students’ GPAs between groups

Study	Purpose	Tradition	Participants	Data / data collection tool(s)	Analysis
	college.” (p. 9)		n=30)		
Munt & Merydith, 2011-2012	“Compare students who were academically unsuccessful with students who experienced academic success in terms of their personal characteristics” (p. 458)	Quantitative	Undergraduate students Participate in retention program (n=145) Control group (n=71)	Demographic information 2 questionnaires GPAs	Descriptive statistics to describe the sample Statistical analyses to compare groups and understand correlations of scores on questionnaires
Pagan & Edwards-Wilson, 2002-2003	“The effectiveness of a mentoring program for 53 at-risk students was investigated” (p. 207)	Unstated and unclear; appears to be mixed methods. Statistical analysis + mentor and mentee recommendations	Mentors (n=7) Mentees (i.e., P; n=53)	Data or data collection not presented in the methodology section.	Presentation of # of meetings/ correspondence between with mentor Topics addressed in meetings Mentor recommendations Mentee recommendations Statistical analysis GPAs before and after intervention Attrition
Seirup & Rose, 2011	“Investigated whether this course could serve as an adequate intervention to increase the GPA	Quantitative	Undergraduate students on academic probation and enrolled in course designed	1 Self-report survey 1 Scale GPAs before	Statistical analysis Comparison of students’ GPAs before and after

Study	Purpose	Tradition	Participants	Data / data collection tool(s)	Analysis
	of college undergraduate placed on probation and if hope affected this particular population's GPA." (p. 2)		to promote success (n=235)	and after participation Retention	the course Compare GPAs of students with different levels of hope % of retention
Shao et al., 2009-2010	"Determine the effects of the Exploration co-curricular on first-year students' academic performance and retention" (p. 435)	Quantitative	Entire cohort of "first-time-in-college" students (n=1084)	Completion of the program Attendance GPAs # of credits attended and earned Retention to next semester and second year Demographic and academic information of the population	Comparisons of program completers and non-completers
Thomas, 2003	"Examine the experiences of university students who had been on academic probation but successfully overcame it" (p. 4)	Qualitative	10 students who had been on academic probation but successfully overcame it	Individual semi-structured interviews	Portrait of each participant Detailed approach (i.e., thematic development)
Tovar & Simon, 2006	"Assessed how students of different ethnicities differed along	Quantitative	First-time college students on academic probation and	1 inventory 1 questionnaire	Statistical analyses comparing ethnic

Study	Purpose	Tradition	Participants	Data / data collection tool(s)	Analysis
	reported levels of academic motivation, general coping, and receptivity to support services.” (p. 547)		on progress probation (n = 315)		groups
Trombley 2000-2001	“Surveyed probation and good standing students at LASC and analyzed their responses with respect to a variety of different variables.” (p. 239)	Quantitative	LASC students Academic probation students (n = 217) Good standing students (n = 138)	1 questionnaire High school GPA College GPA	Statistical analyses comparing probationary students and good standing students

Appendix B: Recruitment Letters

Letter to Francophone Students

Bonjour,

Dans le cadre du programme d'accompagnement scolaire vous avez pris part au projet de recherche sur la persistance et la réussite aux études postsecondaires de septembre à décembre 2007. Suite à ceci, nous vous invitons à participer à un suivi portant sur votre processus de reprise scolaire suite à l'accompagnement reçu dans le cadre du programme. Ceci permettra d'éclairer la poursuite de ce programme.

Dans le cas où vous acceptez de participer à ce suivi, nous vous inviterons à prendre part à trois entrevues d'environ 60 minutes. Ces entrevues porteront sur vos expériences scolaires et votre expérience du programme d'accompagnement scolaire. Elles prendront la forme de discussions informelles dans un lieu de votre choix et à un moment qui vous conviendra. Un montant de 50,00\$ sera remis à chaque participant en guise de remerciement.

Les interviewés auront l'assurance que l'anonymat sera protégé et que le contenu de leurs entrevues demeurera confidentiel. S'ils(elles) le désirent, les participants(es) recevront les résultats finaux de l'étude.

Votre participation à ce projet est entièrement volontaire et votre choix d'y participer ou non n'aura absolument aucune répercussion que ce soit sur vos notes scolaires, votre statut d'étudiant, ou les services qu'on vous offre au Service d'appui au succès scolaire.

Pour toutes questions, ou pour participer à ces entrevues, veuillez communiquer avec nous. Il nous fera plaisir de vous donner plus d'informations au sujet de ce projet.

Letter to Anglophone Students

Hello,

Within the Personalized and Structured Learning Program you took part in the research project on persistence and success in post-secondary studies, from September to December 2007. We now invite you to participate in a follow up on your process of re-engagement in studies in relation to the support obtained in this program. This will allow informing the continuity of the program.

If you choose to participate in this follow up, we will invite you to take part in three interviews of approximately 60 minutes. These interviews will concern your scholastic experiences and your experiences within the Personalized and Structured Learning Program. They will take the form of casual discussions in a place and time convenient to you. An amount of \$50.00 will be handed to each participant in recognition for their time.

Interviewees will be assured that their anonymity will be protected and that the content of the interviews will remain confidential. If they wish, participants will receive the results of this study.

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary and your choice to participate or not will have absolutely no repercussion on your grades, your status as a student, or the services offered to you by the Student Academic Success Service.

For any question, or to take part in the interviews, please contact us. We will be happy to discuss the project with you.

Letter to Professional Resource Personnel

Bonjour,

Dans le cadre du programme d'accompagnement scolaire, vous avez pris part au projet de recherche sur la persistance et la réussite aux études postsecondaires de septembre à décembre 2007. Suite à ceci, nous vous invitons à participer à un suivi portant sur le processus de reprise scolaire d'étudiants(es) sous-gradués(es) en échec, en lien avec l'accompagnement offert dans le cadre du programme. Ceci permettra d'éclairer la poursuite de ce programme.

Dans le cas où vous acceptez de participer à ce suivi, nous vous inviterons à prendre part à trois entrevues d'environ 60 minutes. Ces entrevues porteront sur votre expérience du programme d'accompagnement scolaire. Elles prendront la forme de discussions informelles dans un lieu de votre choix et à un moment qui vous conviendra.

Les interviewés auront l'assurance que l'anonymat sera protégé et que le contenu de leurs entrevues demeurera confidentiel. S'ils(elles) le désirent, les participants(es) recevront les résultats finaux de l'étude.

Votre participation à ce projet est entièrement volontaire et votre choix d'y participer ou non n'aura aucune répercussion sur vous.

Pour toutes questions, ou pour participer à ces entrevues, veuillez communiquer avec nous. Il nous fera plaisir de discuter du projet avec vous.

Appendix C: Consent Forms

Francophone Students Form

Chercheurs

Ruth Phillion, Ph.D., Services d'appui au succès scolaire, Université d'Ottawa

Isabelle Arcand, Candidate au doctorat, Faculté d'éducation, Université d'Ottawa

Raymond Leblanc, Ph.D., Faculté d'éducation, Université d'Ottawa

Michelle Bourassa, Ph.D., Faculté d'éducation, Université d'Ottawa

Participation

Je suis invité(e) à participer au suivi de l'étude sur la persistance et la réussite aux études postsecondaires à laquelle j'ai participé de septembre à décembre 2007 dans le cadre du programme d'accompagnement scolaire offert par le Service d'appui au succès scolaire. Ce suivi visera à mieux comprendre le processus de reprise scolaire suite à l'accompagnement reçu à travers ce programme.

Je prendrai donc part à trois entrevues d'une durée maximale de 60 minutes durant l'été 2008. Ces entrevues semi-structurées porteront sur mes expériences scolaires passées et présentes et sur mon expérience au sein du programme d'accompagnement scolaire. Les entrevues seront prévues selon mes disponibilités et à un endroit qui me convient. Une compensation me sera remise pour chaque entrevue à laquelle je participe. Je recevrai 15,00\$ pour la première entrevue, 15,00\$ pour la deuxième entrevue, et 20,00\$ pour la troisième entrevue, que celles-ci soient terminées et complétées ou non.

Inconvénients possibles

Étant donné que ma participation à cette recherche implique que je donne de l'information personnelle, il est possible qu'elle crée un léger inconfort dû au rappel de certains événements de ma vie. J'ai reçu l'assurance des personnes effectuant la recherche que tout sera fait en vue de minimiser ces risques. De plus, le temps d'entrevue sera limité à 60 minutes même lorsque les questions n'ont pas toutes été traitées, pour éviter que je devienne fatigué(e). Dans le cas où une question ou un moment crée de l'inconfort ou de la fatigue, les entrevues peuvent se terminer, s'écourter, se reporter ou s'annuler sans conséquence. Je suis libre de me retirer de la recherche en tout temps, avant ou pendant une entrevue, refuser d'y participer ou refuser de répondre à certaines questions sans justification et sans inconvénient.

Respect de l'anonymat et de la confidentialité

J'ai l'assurance des personnes effectuant la recherche que l'information que je partagerai avec eux restera strictement confidentielle. Mon anonymat sera garanti. Non seulement le nom des participants(es) seront changés, mais seul les quatre chercheurs ci-haut mentionnés auront accès aux données de recherche. Aussi, aucune information personnelle pouvant m'identifier ne paraîtra dans les travaux produits à travers cette étude. Les enregistrements des entrevues

et les autres données recueillies seront conservées de façon sécuritaire dans le bureau de la chercheuse Ruth Phillion, sous clé dans un classeur et ce, pendant une période de 5 ans.

Acceptation

Ma signature atteste que j'ai clairement compris les renseignements concernant ma participation à ce projet de recherche et indique que j'accepte d'y participer. **Je demeure toutefois libre de me retirer en tout temps de l'étude ou de ne pas répondre à toutes les questions.** Pour tout renseignement additionnel, je peux communiquer avec les chercheurs responsables aux coordonnées suivantes :

Pour tout renseignement d'aspect déontologique et sur mes droits comme participant (e) à une recherche, je peux m'adresser au :

**Responsable de la déontologie en recherche,
Pavillon Tabaret (159), 550, rue Cumberland
(613) 562-5841
Courriel : ethics@uottawa.ca .**

Consentement à participer à la recherche

Il y a deux copies du formulaire de consentement, dont une que je peux garder.

Nom du/de la participant(e)	Signature	Date
.....

Nom de la chercheuse	Signature	Date
.....

Anglophone Students Form

Researchers

Ruth Phillion, PhD, Student Academic Success Service, University of Ottawa
Isabelle Arcand, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
Raymond Leblanc, PhD, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa
Michelle Bourassa, PhD, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

Participation

I am invited to participate in the follow up of the study on persistence and success in post-secondary studies in which I took part from September to December 2007 within the Personalized and Structured Learning Program offered by the Student Academic Success Service. This follow up will seek to better understand the process of re-engagement in studies in relation to the support obtained in this program.

I will thus take part in three interviews lasting a maximum of 60 minutes during the summer 2008. These semi-structured interviews will focus on my past and current scholastic experiences and on my experiences in the Personalized and Structured Learning Program. The interviews will be scheduled in a time and place convenient to me. A compensation will be offered to me for each interview to which I participate. I will receive \$15.00 for the first interview, \$15.00 for the second interview, and \$20.00 for the third interview, whether or not these are finished and completed.

Possible inconvenience

I understand that, since my participation in this study involves sharing personal information, it is possible that it creates a mild discomfort due to reminiscing of life events. The researcher in charge of this investigation assures me however that everything will be done in order to minimize these risks. As well, the interviews will be limited to 60 minutes even if some questions have not been addressed to avoid fatigue in my part. If a question or topic creates discomfort or fatigue, I can stop, shorten, postpone, or cancel the interview without any repercussion. I am free to withdraw from an interview or the study at any moment, before or during an interview, to refuse to participate or answer any question without justification or consequence.

Respect of anonymity and confidentiality

The researcher in charge of this study assures me that the information I will share with them will remain strictly confidential. My anonymity will be guaranteed. Not only will the names of the participants be changed, but only the researcher and her advisor will have access to the raw data and no information that could possibly identify me will appear in any document produced through this study. The interview recordings and other data collected in this study will be securely kept in the researcher's office, in a locked filing cabinet for a period of five years after which they will be destroyed.

Agreement to participate in this study

My signature verifies that I clearly understand the information regarding my participation in this study and confirms that I accept to participate in it. **However, I remain free to withdraw from this study at any time or to choose not to answer all questions.** For any question regarding this study, I can contact the researcher or her supervisor at:

For any question regarding research ethics and my rights as a research participant, I can contact

Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
Tabaret Hall (159), 550, Cumberland St
Tel.: (613) 562-5841
Email: ethics@uottawa.ca

Consent to participate in this study

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which I can keep.

Name of the participant	Signature	Date
.....

Name of the researcher	Signature	Date
.....

Formulaire de consentement pour les accompagnatrices

Chercheurs

Ruth Phillion, Ph.D., Services d'appui au succès scolaire, Université d'Ottawa
Isabelle Arcand, Candidate au doctorat, Faculté d'éducation, Université d'Ottawa
Raymond Leblanc, Ph.D., Faculté d'éducation, Université d'Ottawa
Michelle Bourassa, Ph.D., Faculté d'éducation, Université d'Ottawa

Participation

Je suis invitée à participer au suivi de l'étude sur la persistance et la réussite aux études postsecondaires à laquelle j'ai participé de septembre à décembre 2007 dans le cadre du Programme d'apprentissage personnalisé et structuré offert par le Service d'appui au succès scolaire. Ce suivi visera à mieux comprendre le processus de reprise scolaire suite à l'accompagnement offert.

Je prendrai donc part à trois entrevues d'une durée maximale de 60 minutes durant l'été 2008. Ces entrevues semi-structurées porteront sur mes expériences d'accompagnement passées et présentes et sur mon expérience comme personne ressource au sein du Programme d'apprentissage personnalisé et structuré. Les entrevues seront prévues selon mes disponibilités et à un endroit qui me convient.

Inconvénients possibles

Étant donné que ma participation à cette recherche implique que je donne de l'information personnelle, il est possible qu'elle crée un léger inconfort dû au rappel de certains événements de ma vie. J'ai reçu l'assurance des personnes effectuant la recherche que tout sera fait en vue de minimiser ces risques. De plus, le temps d'entrevue sera limité à 60 minutes même lorsque les questions n'ont pas toutes été traitées, pour éviter que je devienne fatiguée. Dans le cas où une question ou un moment crée de l'inconfort ou de la fatigue, les entrevues peuvent se terminer, s'écourter, se reporter ou s'annuler sans conséquence. Je suis libre de me retirer de la recherche en tout temps, avant ou pendant une entrevue, refuser d'y participer ou refuser de répondre à certaines questions sans justification et sans inconvénient.

Respect de l'anonymat et de la confidentialité

J'ai l'assurance des personnes effectuant la recherche que l'information que je partagerai avec eux restera strictement confidentielle. Mon anonymat sera garanti. Non seulement le nom des participants(es) seront changés, mais seul les quatre chercheurs ci-haut mentionnés auront accès aux données de recherche. Aussi, aucune information personnelle pouvant m'identifier ne paraîtra dans les travaux produits à travers cette étude. Les enregistrements des entrevues et les autres données recueillies seront conservées de façon sécuritaire dans le bureau de la chercheuse sous clé dans un classeur et ce, pendant une période de 5 ans.

Acceptation

Ma signature atteste que j'ai clairement compris les renseignements concernant ma participation à ce projet de recherche et indique que j'accepte d'y participer. **Je demeure toutefois libre de me retirer en tout temps de l'étude ou de ne pas répondre à toutes les questions.** Pour tout renseignement additionnel, je peux communiquer avec les chercheurs responsables aux coordonnées suivantes :

Pour tout renseignement d'aspect déontologique et sur mes droits comme participant (e) à une recherche, je peux m'adresser au :

**Responsable de la déontologie en recherche,
Pavillon Tabaret (159), 550, rue Cumberland
(613) 562-5841
Courriel : ethics@uottawa.ca .**

Consentement à participer à la recherche

Il y a deux copies du formulaire de consentement, dont une que je peux garder.

Nom du/de la participant(e)	Signature	Date
.....

Nom de la chercheure	Signature	Date
.....

Appendix D : Participant academic and socio-demographic information

Pseudonym	Mark	Manelle	Eva	Leena	Anny
Age	22	20	22	22	22
Program of study	General B.A.	Math & Spanish	Visual Arts	Theatre	General B.A.
Admission	Sept 2004	Sept 2005	Sept 2004	Sept 2004	Sept 2003
CGPA Sept 2007	4.2	3	3.3	4	4.4
Family's proximity to university	500 KMs	900 KMs	500 KMs	400 KMs	Same city
Living arrangement	With roommates Close to campus	With cousins One hour bus ride from campus	Apartment style residence On campus	Conventional residence On campus	With parents Same city as campus
Employment	In third year, works part-time with a flexible schedule during the school year	Works over 30 hours/week during the school year	In second year worked part-time, on weekends	Works over 30 hours/week during the school year	Works part-time during the school year. Gets a job towards the end of her studies and works almost full-time.
Family situation	Family led by single mother Two older sisters	Traditional family unit One younger sister	Traditional family unit One older sister	Traditional family unit No siblings	Traditional family unit One younger brother

Pseudonym	Mark	Manelle	Eva	Leena	Anny
Parents' employment	Mother works two jobs to make ends meet	Both parents are employed	Both parents are employed	Both parents are employed	Both parents are employed
Parents' education	Mother did not complete post-secondary education Father completed undergraduate degree when Mark was a teenager	Neither attended university	Undisclosed	Neither attended university	Neither attended university
Siblings' education	Both sisters pursued post-secondary education (university and college)	Sister is in elementary school	Sister pursued university studies	No siblings	Undisclosed

Appendix E : Interview Guides for Students Following Seidman's three-interview structure

Guide for Interviews with Francophone Students

Première entrevue

Présentations

Le but de l'étude est de comprendre les expériences scolaires et universitaires pour mieux saisir les besoins et la réalité des étudiants en probation académiques.

La première entrevue porte sur ton passage au primaire et au secondaire. Pour répondre à mes questions, parle-moi de ce qui est pertinent et important pour toi, même si ça n'est pas directement lié à l'école.

- Peux-tu me parler de tes expériences scolaires de façon générale?

École élémentaire

- Peux-tu me parler de tes premières expériences à l'école?
- Peux-tu relater une expérience scolaire particulièrement positive à l'école élémentaire?
 - S'agit-il d'une expérience importante?
 - Pourquoi?
- As-tu connu des défis à l'école élémentaire?
 - Est-ce que ces défis ont pris une place importante dans ton expérience?
 - Pourquoi?
- Y'a-t-il eu des relations importantes pour toi au primaire?
 - Amitiés? / Quelle était l'attitude de tes amis face à l'école?
 - Enseignant(e)s qui t'ont influencé, que tu appréciais? / Pourquoi?
 - As-tu des frères et sœurs?
 - À la maison, quelle était l'attitude face à l'école quand tu étais au primaire?
- Est-ce que tu aimais l'école?
 - Pourquoi? / Pourquoi pas?
- Est-ce qu'il y a eu des événements ou des changements importants dans ta vie quand tu étais enfant?
 - Est-ce que ça t'a beaucoup affecté?
 - Comment t'es-tu adapté à ceci?

École secondaire

- Comment s'est passée la transition vers l'école secondaire?
- Quand tu penses à ton passage à l'école secondaire, qu'est-ce qui te vient en tête?
 - S'agit-il d'une expérience importante?
 - Pourquoi?
- Peux-tu me parler d'expériences positives à l'école secondaire?
 - S'agit-il d'une expérience importante?
 - Pourquoi?
- As-tu connu des défis au secondaire?
 - Est-ce que ces défis ont pris une place importante dans ton expérience?
 - Pourquoi?
- Y'a-t-il eu des relations importantes pour toi au primaire?
 - Amitiés? / Quelle était l'attitude de tes amis face à l'école?
 - Enseignant(e)s qui t'ont influencé, que tu appréciais? / Pourquoi?
 - As-tu des frères et sœurs?
 - À la maison, quelle était l'attitude face à l'école quand tu étais au primaire?
- Peux-tu me parler de ton école secondaire?
 - Implication au niveau de la communauté
 - Y'avait-il plusieurs clubs, comités, équipes sportives?
 - Étais-tu très impliqué(e) / Dans quels clubs? / Qu'est-ce que ça t'apportait?
 - Avais-tu l'impression que tes enseignant(e)s connaissaient bien la matière qu'ils/elles enseignaient? / Qu'ils/elles étaient de bon(ne)s enseignant(e)s?
 - Est-ce que les attentes étaient élevées?
- C'était quoi tes intérêts au secondaire?
- C'était qui tes modèles?
- Est-ce qu'il y a eu des événements ou des changements importants dans ta vie quand tu étais adolescent?
 - Est-ce que ça t'a beaucoup affecté?
 - Comment t'es-tu adapté à ceci?
- Y'a-t-il autre chose dont je n'ai pas parlé mais qui selon toi a été significatif dans ton histoire scolaire au primaire ou au secondaire?

Deuxième entrevue

Résumé de la première entrevue

- Est-ce que tes expériences scolaires passées, lointaines et récentes ont contribué à construire l'étudiant(e) que tu es devenu(e)?
 - Comment?

Vie universitaire

- Peux-tu me parler de la transition vers l'université?
 - Adaptation à la taille des classes, de l'université
 - Adaptation au rythme et aux demandes de l'université (charge de travail)
 - As-tu dû déménager, quitter la maison de tes parents?
 - C'était comment?
 - Situation de logement
 - Adaptation à l'indépendance que demande l'université
 - Amitiés
 - As-tu gardé contact avec certains amis?
 - As-tu créé des liens avec de nouveaux amis?
- Avec le recul, crois-tu que tu étais prêt(e) pour des études universitaires?
 - Avais-tu des attentes de ce que serait la vie et le travail universitaire?
 - Avais-tu une bonne idée de ce dont l'université s'attendait de toi?
 - Crois-tu que ton passage au secondaire t'avait bien préparé pour l'université?
 - Les stratégies et méthodes de travail qui te servaient bien au secondaire t'étaient-elles encore utiles à l'université?
- Peux-tu me décrire une journée typique de ta vie étudiante?
 - Nombre de cours suivis
 - Nombre d'heures passées à étudier
 - Nombre d'heures travaillées
 - Vie sociale
- Qu'est-ce qui a été facile à université?
 - Est-ce qu'il y a des moments où tu te sens/sentais vraiment bien (comme tu souhaites te sentir) dans ta vie étudiante?
 - Peux-tu me parler un peu plus de choses que tu ressens face à différentes facettes de ta vie universitaire?
- Qu'est-ce qui a été plus difficile à l'université?
 - C'était dû à quoi?
 - Quelles démarches as-tu entreprises pour remédier à ces difficultés?
 - Est-ce que ça a été utile?
 - Comment l'université / ta faculté t'a soutenu dans ces difficultés?
 - Est-ce que c'était aidant? / suffisant?

- Avec le recul, peux-tu me décrire quels étaient tes besoins en tant qu'étudiant(e)?
- Quels ont été les individus clé de ton quotidien à l'université?
 - Pourquoi s'agit-il de personnes clé?
 - Parle-moi de tes rapports avec ces personnes.
 - Est-ce que certaines personnes auraient pu faire plus pour t'aider?
- Quelles sont les activités principales dans ta vie d'étudiant(e)?
 - Pourquoi ces activités sont-elles importantes?
- Est-ce que ces rapports et activités sont satisfaisants et répondent à tes besoins en tant qu'étudiant(e)?

Expérience de probation et d'accompagnement scolaire

- Peux-tu me parler de ce qui a contribué à faire baisser tes résultats scolaires?
 - Ça a commencé quand?
- Le fait d'être placé en probation académique, est-ce que ça a eu un effet sur toi?
- Peux-tu me parler de ton expérience avec le programme d'accompagnement?
 - Qu'est-ce que ce programme t'a apporté de plus bénéfique?
 - Y aurais-tu participé si ça n'avait pas été obligatoire?
- Est-ce que ça a été important de participer à ce programme au moment où tu l'as fait?
- Qu'est-ce que tu as le plus apprécié?
 - Pourquoi?
 - Pourquoi c'était important?
- Qu'est-ce qui a moins bien fonctionné pour toi?
 - Pourquoi?
 - Tu proposerais quoi plutôt?
- Peux-tu me parler de ton accompagnatrice?
 - Style, présence, disponibilité, ouverture, philosophie d'accompagnement
 - Vos interactions
 - Considères-tu que la relation d'aide avec ton accompagnatrice a été importante dans ton processus de reprise dans le programme?
- Est-ce que ce programme a eu des influences positives sur toi en tant qu'étudiant(e)?
- Avec l'expérience d'y avoir participé, dirais-tu que les stratégies et le format du programme étaient utiles?
 - Qu'est-ce qui était le plus utile?
 - Est-ce que ça répondait à tes besoins?

- Est-ce que certains de tes besoins n'étaient pas rencontrés?
 - Si oui, qu'est-ce qu'on aurait pu faire de plus ou de différent pour mieux te servir à ce niveau?

Troisième entrevue

- Si je te demandais de te décrire comme personne, tu répondrais quoi?
- Au regard de ce que tu as partagé dans les entrevues précédentes, peux-tu me dire comment tu te conçois dans ton rôle d'étudiant(e)?
- On a parlé d'expériences positives dans tes études passées et courantes, peux-tu me parler de la place de ces expériences positives dans ta vie d'étudiant(e)?
- On a aussi discuté de défis auxquels tu as fait face, peux-tu me parler de ceux-ci dans ta vie d'étudiant(e)?
- Qu'est-ce qui a contribué à ton avis aux revers que tu as connus en contexte académique?
- Dans le meilleur des mondes, qu'est-ce qui répondrait à tes besoins en tant qu'étudiant(e) et qui favoriserait ton succès scolaire?

Guide for Interviews with Anglophone Students

Goal of the study is to understand students' experiences in school and in order to better grasp probationary students' needs and reality.

In the first interview I'll mainly try to learn about factual details of you life in elementary and high school. When answering my questions, just tell me what's relevant and significant to you. Sometimes it won't be related to school and that's ok.

First interview

Elementary school

- Can you tell me about your first experiences with school?
- Can you tell me about an experience that was particularly positive in relation to elementary school?
 - Was this experience significant?
 - Why?
- Did you face challenges in elementary school?
 - Were these challenges significant?
 - Why?
- Were there important relationships for you through elementary school?
 - Important friendships? / What was your friends' attitude toward school?
 - Were there teachers you particularly liked? / Why?
 - Do you have brothers or sisters? / When you in elementary school, what was the attitude at home concerning school?
- Did you generally like school?
 - Why? / Why not?
- Were there important changes / events in your life when you were a child?
 - How was that for you?
 - Did you adjust fairly easily?

High school

- How was the transition from elementary school to high school?
- When you think about your experience in high school, what comes to mind?
 - Was this experience significant?
 - Why?

- Can you tell me about positive experiences in high school?
 - Was this experience significant?
 - Why?
- Did you face challenges in high school?
 - Was this significant?
 - Why?
- Were there important relationships for you through high school?
 - Important friendships? / What was your friends' attitude toward school?
 - Were there teachers you particularly liked? / Why?
 - When you in high school, what was the attitude at home concerning school?
- Can you tell me a bit about your high school?
 - Did it have strong sports teams, did it have many clubs and committees, was it very involved in social issues?
 - Were you very involved in sports or clubs in high school?
 - What were your main interests when you were in high school?
 - Do you feel your teachers were knowledgeable?
 - Were they strict?
 - Were they supportive?
 - Were the expectations high?
- Were there important changes in your life when you were in high school?
 - How was that for you?
 - Did you adjust fairly easily?
- Is there anything else that seems to have been important in your life while you were in elementary school and high school that I didn't talk about?

Second interview

Second interview is again, about factual information in regards to your undergraduate experience and the companioning program.

Summary of First Interview

- Did the experiences you've mentioned today help build the student you were in university?
 - How so?

University life

- Can you tell me about the transition from high school to university?

- Adaptation to the rhythm and expectations of university (heavy workload)
- Adaptation to the size of the university and the size of the classes?
- Did you move away from home? How was that?
 - What was your living arrangement?
 - Adaptation to the independence required in university?
- Friends
 - Making new friends
 - Separating from high school friends
- Looking back on your entry in university, do you think you were ready for post-secondary studies?
 - Did you have expectations of university life and work?
 - Did you have an idea of what was expected of you in university?
 - Were the methods and strategies that had served you well in high school sufficient in university?
 - Did high school prepare you for university studies?
- Can you describe a typical day in your student life?
 - Number of classes
 - Hours of study
 - Job
 - Social life
- What was easy in university?
 - Were there times where you feel really good in regards to your university life?
 - Can you tell me more about how you feel in regards to different aspects of your academic life?
- What was difficult in university?
 - What was it due to?
 - Did you take steps to respond to those difficulties?
 - Did that help?
 - What did the university / faculty do to help you?
 - Could they have done more? If so, what could they have done?
- Reflecting on it now, can you tell me what your needs as a student were?
- Who were the key people in your daily life?
 - Why are they key people?
 - Tell me about your interactions with these people.
 - Could they have done more?
- Tell me about the main activities in your daily student life.
 - Why are these activities important?
- Do the interactions and activities you're describing satisfy your needs as a student?

- Can you tell me about your understanding of university context?
 - Structure
 - Culture

Academic Probation and Companionship

- Can you tell me what has contributed to lowering your grades?
 - When did it start?
- Has being on probation had any effect on you?
- Can you tell me about your experience with the companionship program?
 - What are the benefits of your participation in this program?
 - Your participation in it was compulsory for you to remain registered in your program. Would you have committed to it if it hadn't been?
 - Reflecting on this now, was it fair to make this program compulsory?
- Was it important for you to participate in this program at that time?
- What did you most appreciate through this program?
 - Why?
 - Why was it important?
- What was less satisfying for you?
 - Why?
 - What could have been better in your view?
- Can you tell me about your academic companion?
 - Style, presence, availability, openness, her companionship philosophy.
 - Tell me about your interactions with her.
 - Do you consider that your relationship with her was important in your process through the program?
- Did this program have positive influences on you as a student?
- Having participated in it, do you feel that its modalities were useful?
 - What was most useful?
 - Did it meet your needs?
 - Were some of your needs not met? What could have been done to better help you?

Third interview

The third interview is more about your thoughts and the meaning you attach to the experiences you talked about in the first and second interviews. So I'll ask you to reflect a bit.

Summary of first two interviews

- Can you tell me about you as a person now (how you describe yourself)?
- Has the person you became been influenced by past experiences?
- Did your past scholastic experiences contribute to shape the student you have become?
- If I asked you to describe yourself as a person, what would you say?
- Given what you have shared in previous interviews, can you tell me how you conceive your role as a student?
- We talked about positive experiences in your past and current studies, can you tell me how significant these experiences have been in your life as a student?
- We also talked about challenges you faced, can you tell me what role they have played in your academic life?
- What has contributed to the setbacks you experienced in the academic context?
- In the best situation possible, what would satisfy your needs as a student and foster your academic success?

Appendix F: Interview Guide for the Academic Companion

Le but de l'entrevue est de discuter du programme et du processus d'accompagnement. Les étudiant(e)s m'ont donné leur point de vue puis maintenant je voudrais connaître ta perspective en tant qu'accompagnatrice.

Général

- Peux-tu me parler de la formation qui t'a amenée à devenir une accompagnatrice scolaire?
- Peux-tu me parler des expériences de vie qui t'ont amenée à devenir une accompagnatrice scolaire?
- Qu'est-ce que l'accompagnement scolaire?
 - Qu'est-ce qui est essentiel au processus d'accompagnement?
 - Qu'est-ce qui fait qu'un processus d'accompagnement est exceptionnel?
- Qu'est-ce qu'une bonne accompagnatrice?
 - Style,
 - Qualités, personnalité
 - Formation

Programme d'accompagnement scolaire

- Peux-tu me décrire l'objectif du programme d'accompagnement scolaire?
 - Parle-moi de ces étudiant(e)s qui sont en probation académique et avec qui tu as travaillé de façon générale.
 - Comment se fait-il qu'ils se retrouvent en probation académique?
 - De façon globale, quels sont leurs besoins les plus pressants?
 - Comment l'université peut-elle mieux les soutenir dans leur parcours scolaire?
- Peux-tu me parler de ton travail auprès d'étudiant(e)s en situation d'échec à travers ce programme?
 - Quelles étaient tes fonctions principales?
 - Comment conçois-tu ton rôle auprès des étudiant(e)s du programme?
 - Parle-moi de tes rapports avec les étudiant(e)s.
 - Qu'est-ce qui guide ton travail d'accompagnement auprès d'étudiant(e)s?
- As-tu une philosophie d'accompagnement?
- Quel sens donnes-tu à ton travail d'accompagnement?
- En te basant sur ton expérience professionnelle et tes impressions personnelles, peux-tu me parler de ce qui a bien fonctionné dans le programme ?

- Pourquoi ça a bien fonctionné?
- Tires-tu des leçons importantes de cette première cohorte/édition du programme?
 - Lesquelles?
 - Pourquoi est-ce important?
- Si c'était à refaire, changerais-tu quelque chose au programme pour l'améliorer?
 - Pourquoi?

Appendix G: Interview Guide for the Program Developer

Le but de l'entrevue est de discuter du programme et du processus d'accompagnement. Les étudiant(e)s m'ont donné leur point de vue puis maintenant je voudrais connaître ta perspective en tant que conceptrice du programme.

Général

- Qu'est-ce que l'accompagnement scolaire?
 - Qu'est-ce qui est primordial dans le processus d'accompagnement?
 - Qu'est-ce qui fait qu'un processus d'accompagnement est exceptionnel?

- Qu'est-ce qu'une bonne accompagnatrice?
 - Style
 - Qualités / Personnalité
 - Formation

- Qu'est-ce qui fait que les universités font face à un nombre grandissant d'échecs scolaires?
 - Peux-tu me parler des politiques/philosophie de l'université quant à l'échec scolaire et la probation académique?
 - Est-ce qu'on offre suffisamment de soutien aux étudiant(e)s?

Programme d'accompagnement

- Pourquoi as-tu cherché à monter ce programme?

- Quels étaient les objectifs du programme?
 - Comment as-tu sélectionné l'accompagnatrice du programme?
 - Pourquoi ces critères sont-ils si importants?

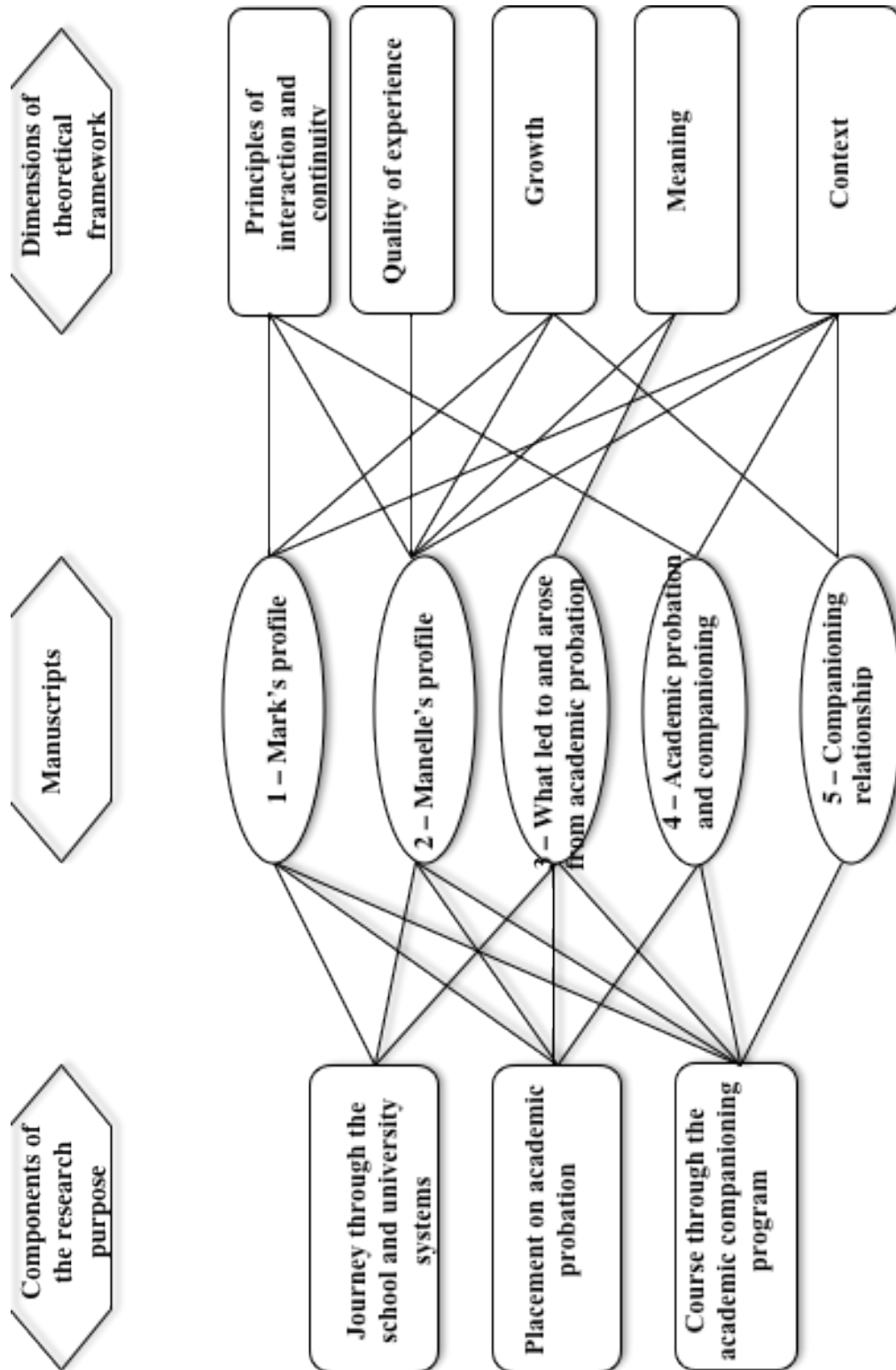
 - Parle-moi de ces étudiant(e)s qui sont en probation académique et qui ont participé au programme d'accompagnement.
 - Comment se fait-il qu'ils/elles se retrouvent en probation académique?
 - De façon globale, quels sont leurs besoins les plus pressants?
 - Comment l'université peut-elle les soutenir dans leur parcours scolaire?

- Si je te demandais de décrire la philosophie qui a guidé la conception et la mise sur pieds du programme d'accompagnement, tu répondrais quoi?

- Peux-tu me parler du travail d'accompagnement auprès d'étudiant(e)s en situation d'échec dans ce programme?
 - Quelles étaient les fonctions principales de l'accompagnatrice?
 - Quel était son rôle auprès des étudiant(e)s du programme?

- Peux-tu me parler de ce qui a bien fonctionné dans le programme
 - Pourquoi?
- Tires-tu des leçons importantes de cette première cohorte/édition du programme?
 - Lesquelles?
 - Pourquoi est-ce important?
- Si c'était à refaire, changerais-tu quelque chose au programme pour l'améliorer?
 - Pourquoi?

Appendix H : Concept Map – Research Purpose, Theoretical Framework, and Manuscripts



Appendix I : Mark's Profile

Mark, the first participant of this study was a 22 year-old male in his 3rd year of studies. Notes in the researcher journal show that the discussions flowed well between him and I. Interview questions triggered elaborate in-depth stories eloquently told. He shared many relevant factual details of his experience as well as the significance of events and incidents.

This participant was admitted as a probationary student in the General Bachelor program in the Faculty of Arts in September 2004. After the spring 2007 term, his CGPA was under the minimum required by his program and he was withdrawn from his program of study. After an appeal, he was given the possibility to register to his program of study, while receiving assistance from a companionship program.

Family

Mark grew up with his mother and two older stepsisters. His father and his grandfather were also important figures in his life. When he was a child, his mother worked two jobs to make ends meet and instilled discipline and order in her family. An avid reader, she was articulate and eloquent, and encouraged her children to voice their opinion. Mark described his father as a wandering nomad, who installed stability in his life after having a child. He had an acute interest in politics and literature, inspiring Mark's own interests. Both his parents, as well as his grandfather and his two older stepsisters were great sources of support, for school and future endeavours.

Elementary School

Reportedly, Mark had little interest and was not challenged in school and therefore, put little effort in his studies. He also mentioned that although he always had to attend school there was not an emphasis on excelling academically in his family. Concurrently, what was

most important to him in elementary school was playing football every recess. His friendships in elementary school revolved around sports. He did not however, recall particularly significant friendships stating that his family moved numerous times as he was growing up. As a result he did not establish long lasting friendships and often felt like an outsider.

High School

Not having been admitted to the high school of his choice due to insufficient grades, Mark attended his district high school, a “ghetto school”. In addition, he was not admitted in advanced classes, which unsettled him: “*That has an effect on kids, I’m sure, the whole idea that you’re not in the class with the smart people, you know?*” A year later, concerns about the friendships Mark had established in high school and his plunging grades led his mother to move to a different neighbourhood. There, he attended a better school and became friends with serious students.

Mark had mixed experiences with high school teachers. Some recognized his talent and encouraged him to pursue post-secondary studies. With other teachers, he was in conflict. In their class, he was not challenged or motivated to pay attention. Disinterest led him to put little effort in his class assignments and homework. He was more interested in sports, specifically football, and raised his grades, as it was a condition to play in his high school varsity football team.

But that was probably just ‘Man I don’t want to be in school. I don’t want to be here at all. I want to be outside. And I want to be playing sports. And I want to be having a good time. I don’t not want to listen to this teacher talk about things I don’t want to know’”.

University

Discussing the social stigma concerning education and opportunities, Mark admitted that he was determined to avoid the fate of some of his family members who, he believed, were trapped in lower middle class with no chance of improvement. This channelled a strong motivation to complete bachelor degree.

Mark moved away from his family to pursue post-secondary studies. Early in the school year he was forced to vacate his residence room for violating the housing service's code of conduct. This represented a major obstacle in his transition to university. He felt mistreated by the housing service and therefore by his university. As a result, he felt like he was not welcome and did not belong in university, making it difficult for him to get engaged in his studies. For lack of better options he moved in with newly met fellow students and found himself in a living arrangement that was not conducive to productive study habits. Other significant relationships in university included a girlfriend who had a bipolar disorder and a good friend who had similar interests and focused on hobbies more than studying. Peer pressure was an important challenge for Mark in university.

I didn't even wanna come, you know, I thought that school wasted my time type thing. You know, I was still reading the books, I was reading a lot o' the books and the required readings for those classes I just wasn't going, to the seminars, sometimes even to the tests. You know, at that point I didn't care at all about the grades. (...)

Didn't feel like I belonged and it was that absolute, it was an overwhelming feeling that I needed to belong to something. And what I did belong to was this group o' people that liked to drink and do drugs, and we had a great time together, we had a

lota fun together but it just wasn't productive, I wasn't doing what I was supposed to be doing, you know?

Through university, Mark had been captivated by certain classes. He generally enjoyed class, he appreciated the idea that through teaching, thoughts and information were being transmitted and he liked being in an environment where people reflected and discussed. However, in his second year in university, at the peak of his difficulties, he struggled to carry on his student activities. *"It was painful to be in class. I didn't want to be in class, I didn't want to be there at all."*

Some professors had the ability to make their class engaging which was necessary for him to commit and learn in university. To enjoy and engage with class material, he also needed to be challenged, which meant having to complete demanding class assignments with liberty. He also deplored the fact that there was little mentoring from professors and although he understood the reality of university teaching, he believed he could learn far more in a one on one context. Evidently, he did better in classes in which he was engaged. It was easier for him to commit to learning in classes in which he was interested and where he could develop a relationship with the professor.

Interviewer: Do you tend to do better in the classes in which you're engaged?

Way better, yeah, not even close. And I do bad in classes I'm not interested in, just cause I don't care. And seriously, that's probably the right word for it too. I just wanna get through.

Interviewer: So what does it mean to be engaged?

Uh, to have a relationship with the professor, if I like the professor and the professor takes the time to learn my name, I'm damn well gonna be handing in good papers.

There's no question about it. If he knows me and I know him and we've talked about

things, yeah, I'm gonna do everything I can to do my best. Whereas if I don't know the professor, and there's 240 kids and it's a terrible class, you know, he doesn't know me I'm [a number] to him you know, I don't care.

Mark was passionate about creative writing. At the time of the interviews he wrote articles for an online journal but his true passion was writing poetry as well as screenplay. He had been prolific during his university studies writing movie scripts and poems. Although he was passionate about creative writing and derived positive energy from it, this diverted his engagement in his studies.

When he experienced difficulties, Mark did not seek help from the support services offered by his university. After losing an appeal with the housing services and feeling like he had been mistreated in the process, he did not have faith in his university and would not turn to its services or personnel for support. He believed however that he did not have academic related needs. Mainly, he needed to develop self-discipline, which he eventually did, with his own resources. Admittedly, he also needed to uncover desire to study and be in school. He dissociated himself from unconstructive friendships and moved out to a better living arrangement to avoid peer pressure and be more focused on his studies. He also sought to be integrated in university, which was facilitated by applying himself in his classes.

*If I really apply myself in the courses, I end up meeting like half the class you know?
And we end up talking about different things and you make friends based on desire to learn, desire to improve, desire to know more.*

Withdrawal from his Program of Study

Mark had been admitted to university as an at-risk acceptance, his grades being below the minimum admission average. He felt that he had been given an opportunity through this admission. His acceptance letter informed him of the requirement to obtain and retain a 3.5

or above CGPA to remain in his program of study. He had also received an information package on the academic support services offered by his university. He chose not to take advantage of these services, as he did not feel he needed them.

Despite his efforts to enhance his grades after struggling in first and second year, he was withdrawn from his program of study seeing as his grades were below the minimum CGPA required by his university. After winning an appeal to his mandatory withdrawal he was given the possibility to register in his program of study while participating in a companioning program. He welcomed the opportunity to obtain assistance and to keep his student status. The urgency of the situation and the anticipation of a possible failure had a negative effect on him and his beliefs in his capacities to be successful in university. Albeit the emotional toll it had on him, he used the situation in a constructive manner and drew lessons from his past reminding himself that he would suffer repercussions if he did not focus on his studies.

When you fail, you feel like a failure, right? And that is just a breeding ground for insecurity. You think that you can't achieve things, or what you set out to do.

Especially in university where it seems like everybody else is doing well, you know?

(...) But if you are failing, you think I'm one of the people that can't cut it, you know,

I'm not fit to be here.

He understood that his participation in the companioning program was compulsory for him to remain in university but he gladly committed to it. He was in the right state of mind, having made changes in his social life and living environment and having acquired the confidence that he could be successful in university. However, he expressed his participation in the program came a year too late since he had already made adjustments in his life, on his own. He acknowledged through the program that putting in the work and implementing

structure in his academic life would be vital in his academic success. With regards to benefits of the program, he felt that the reflection involved in the program was quite useful.

Interviewer: What did you write about [in the weekly reflective journal]?

Just progress. Where I'm at with each assignment, how much time I have to go before deadlines, um, and I guess you can, when you sit down every week and write down how your week was, you really do see kinda the mental stability you get from doing well. I think that's something that a lot o' people don't realize is that when you start doing well in school, you become more stable. You really do. (...) So, when I reflected and saw 'Yeah, I wrote two tests this week and I studied for ten hours.' (...) And it's like 'Man, it was a little more work but I felt a lot better at the end of week 1'. So I'm gonna keep doing that you know?

Having an academic companion supporting him, monitoring his progress, and caring about his success ignited his desire to do well. Furthermore, her encouragements and faith in him gave him hope. He felt that his companion was without question very knowledgeable but he emphasized that she was warm and caring and that he appreciated her presence “*When she's with you, she's really with you.*” In fact, the connection with his academic companion was fundamental in his process through the program.

I think that program really, really, really depends on the person who is interviewing you, and if it was Danielle, I think it would've made a difference. (...) Although it takes a long time to trust somebody, you know? She's just a great person. You feel comfortable with her the second you meet her. We had very compatible personalities.

Interviewer: So compatibility is important....

Oh! Absolutely. I think it's probably the most important thing in the program, is the compatibility between the advisor and the student. Probably number one.

Summary and Outcome

Mark faced multiple challenges in university such as being forced to vacate the university residence, a living arrangement not conducive to studies and relationships not favourable to academic activities. Through these experiences, it became painful for Mark to be in class. However, he also shared that he generally enjoyed class, particularly when professors were engaging, when he could develop a relationship with the professor, and when he was challenged. Creative writing was a driving force for him but it interfered with his studies when he prioritized writing above school.

When he faced academic difficulties he did not seek help from academic support services. He relied on his own resources to reconnect with his desire to be in school and develop the self-discipline he needed. The notice of withdrawal had an emotional toll on him but he used his concerns productively to remain focused on his studies. A notable benefit from participating in the companioning program regarded the reflection he engaged in. By critically observing his activities he acknowledged that putting in the work led to progress and feeling better about himself and his studies. Also, he strongly believed his academic companion played an important role in his recovery process. Her personality, presence, and knowledge were essential in the rapport they developed.

While participating in this program, in the fall term of 2007, he successfully completed four classes and was allowed to continue studying in his university, keeping his probationary status. He followed five classes in the winter 2008 term, and at the time of the interviews was in his final semester expecting to graduate. He intended to apply to renowned programs in creative writing, after completing his bachelor degree.

Appendix J: Le Profil de Manelle

Manelle, la deuxième participante de cette étude avait vingt ans et entamait sa troisième année d'études. Les commentaires du journal de la chercheuse indiquent que l'étudiante parlait franchement, semblait avoir réfléchi à ses expériences vécues en contextes scolaire et universitaire et abordait instinctivement la signification des événements qu'elle rapportait.

L'étudiante a été admise au Département de mathématiques et de statistique à la Faculté des sciences en septembre 2005. Après sa deuxième année d'études, sa moyenne pondérée cumulative (MPC) étant inférieure aux critères de rendement scolaire satisfaisants de son université, elle fut contrainte d'abandonner ses études. Suite à un appel via le Centre de recours étudiant, elle obtint la possibilité de demeurer inscrite à son programme d'études à la session d'automne 2007, tout en recevant un appui académique adapté.

Famille

Manelle était originaire d'une région francophone dans une province majoritairement anglophone. Elle avait grandi avec ses deux parents et avait une sœur de 12 ans sa cadette. Elle était une étudiante de première génération et estimait que le fait que ses parents aient poursuivi ou non des études postsecondaires n'avait pas joué un rôle important dans son parcours scolaire. Elle signalait que ses parents l'encourageaient à poursuivre des études universitaires et cet appui favorisait à son avis, son expérience universitaire.

École élémentaire

La participante se souvenait d'avoir été une élève forte. Elle était sérieuse, aimait apprendre et croyait que ce plaisir était lié à son succès scolaire. Indépendante, elle faisait ses travaux et devoirs avec facilité et avec peu d'aide ou de surveillance bien que ses parents, comme ses enseignant(e)s soient présents et disponibles en cas de besoin. « *Y'ont toujours*

été dévoués à moi pis à mon école, toujours là si j'avais besoin de l'aide mais, j'en avais jamais vraiment besoin. » Ses relations étaient généralement positives à l'école élémentaire; ses nombreux ami(e)s étaient importants pour elle et l'avaient accompagnée tout au long de son parcours scolaire. Toutefois, elle n'avait pas souvenir d'enseignant(e)s qui l'avaient particulièrement marquée.

École secondaire

À son entrée au secondaire Manelle envisageait devenir éducatrice de la petite enfance et projetait suivre une formation dans le domaine. Elle anticipait donc une transition vers les études postsecondaire et s'y préparait. Ses relations amicales demeuraient positives et stables et encore une fois, ne rapporta pas de relations particulières avec ses enseignant(e)s. Elle demeurait une élève forte et autonome au secondaire; elle faisait le travail requis et ses efforts rapportaient largement. *« Honnêtement, au secondaire j'ai pas tellement travaillé fort. (...) j'avais pas à me forcer. J'étudiais pas, je lisais mes notes une fois 'Ok, that's it.' Pis le lendemain j'allais faire mon test pis j'avais dans les 88, 90. »* Un emploi en garderie, en lien avec son projet de devenir éducatrice avait ponctué son parcours scolaire. Elle y travaillait tous les soirs après l'école ce qui n'interférait pas, disait-elle, avec ses études.

Université

Manelle estimait que sa transition universitaire s'était bien déroulée indiquant qu'elle était responsable et mature. Toutefois, plusieurs obstacles se dessinent dans son histoire. D'abord, elle s'était sentie intimidée par le contexte impersonnel de l'université.

Intervieweuse : C'est quoi qui est intimidant?

Ben je l'sais pas, peut-être le fait d'être un inconnu, je l'sais pas, que cette personne là [le professeur] t'a connais pas vraiment, pis ou est-ce que moi j'viens d'une p'tite

ville que, me semble on les connaît, y'en a que c'était la mère de mon amie, la tante à une autre de mes amies. Fait que c'était une relation moins intimidante on peut dire, c'était plus proche.

L'étudiante avait dû s'éloigner de sa famille pour poursuivre des études universitaires, ce qui avait généré plusieurs obstacles. D'abord elle avait eu du mal à s'adapter au travail lié aux tâches quotidiennes et ménagères puis à organiser son espace de vie. De plus, Manelle avait déménagé à plusieurs reprises ne trouvant pas de logement adéquat et propice aux études.

Après un an j'suis déménagée avec mon autre cousine, pis ça ça vraiment pas fonctionné, j'ai re-déménagé encore avec mon cousin pis c'est de là que j'suis partie avec mon chum.

Intervieweuse : T'as dit qu'avec ta cousine ça fonctionnait pas?

Non, ça fonctionnait pas non. J'vivais dans la cave pis c'était vraiment pas une place à vivre parce qu'elle avait toute ses sacs de poubelle, elle descendait en bas à 5h du matin elle criait en haut à sa fille de se dépêcher pis moi j'étais couchée t'sais j'avais étudié jusqu'à minuit, 1h pis me faire réveiller à 5h le matin par des cris, c'était vraiment pas respectueux. Fait que j'ai décidé de partir, c'était juste trop là.

Plusieurs amitiés d'enfance s'étaient effritées au cours de son parcours universitaire. Au moment des entrevues elle n'entretenait plus de liens solides avec ses ami(e)s de longue date. Par ailleurs, elle n'avait pas créé de liens significatifs dans sa ville d'accueil ou dans sa communauté universitaire. De plus, bien que ses parents soient toujours disponibles, elle trouvait difficile d'entretenir une relation « *au bout du téléphone* » avec eux. Il semble donc qu'elle ait bénéficié de peu de soutien lors de sa transition et de son parcours universitaire.

Ben c'est facile de créer des liens, c'est pas toujours facile de créer des bons liens.

Intervieweuse : Des bons liens, des bons amis...

Oui, c'est facile de trouver des amis pour sortir pis toute ça mais pour avoir des amis que tu peux compter, qu'y soient là dans les temps difficiles j'ai trouvé ça vraiment différent là pis encore aujourd'hui j'ai encore de la difficulté à pouvoir trouver quelqu'un que, t'sais, si t'as besoin d'l'aide y vont être là.

Manelle devait travailler de nombreuses heures pour subvenir à ses besoins. Elle avait établi un horaire de cours en fonction de cet emploi auquel elle dédiait entre 5 et 8 heures par jour. En plus de cet emploi, elle soulignait que le rythme universitaire divergeait largement de celui qu'elle avait connu au secondaire. Elle avait été surprise par la charge de travail requise au niveau universitaire, avait du mal à maintenir le rythme attendu et décrochait de faibles notes. Bien qu'elle croyait savoir à quoi s'attendre du parcours postsecondaire, elle prit éventuellement conscience qu'elle n'avait pas une conception claire de ce qui était attendu des d'étudiants universitaires.

Euh, j'croyais savoir. (...) je m'attendais à ce que quand j'ai arrivé à l'université, oui, j'aurais du travail à faire, pis oui ça aurait été un peu plus difficile mais je croyais pas que c'était pour me « crasher » dans face comme on peut dire, que c'était pour être si vite, si fort, si intense.

Il semble que ses stratégies et méthodes de travail adaptées au secondaire ne lui permettaient plus d'obtenir de résultats universitaires satisfaisants. Le rythme rapide et les demandes élevées l'avaient désorganisé et désorienté. *« J'savais pu où aller, j'savais pas quelle direction prendre, j'savais pu quoi faire. »*

Manelle considérait que son passage à l'école secondaire ne l'avait pas convenablement préparée à une transition postsecondaire. *« Quand je suis rentrée à l'université je me suis fait donné une claque par la tête. (...) je crois qu'y m'ont pas préparée*

du tout. J'avais ça facile au secondaire (...) je suis arrivée à l'université pis j'ai vraiment d'la misère. » Entres autres, l'étudiante sentait que son français n'était pas à niveau. Elle avait l'impression de ne pas avoir développé les habiletés linguistiques lui permettant de s'exprimer de façon adéquate à l'oral et à l'écrit. *« Mon français a beaucoup amélioré depuis j'suis ici. (...) mais faudrait probablement que ça s'améliore encore. Mais encore ça, ça retourne que si j'aurais été bien préparée que j'aurais été encore mieux préparée. »*

Il avait été particulièrement difficile pour Manelle de concevoir qu'elle n'excellait pas au niveau universitaire comme c'était le cas au secondaire, et ce malgré les efforts redoublés. Face à cette constatation, elle se questionnait quand à ses habiletés d'étudiante et sa capacité à réussir en contexte universitaire.

Ça a affecté beaucoup ma confiance dans ce temps là. Je me disais « Ben, c'tu juste moi qui a slacké, c'tu juste moi qui est pas capable au niveau universitaire ou si c'est vraiment les profs ou c'est les standards? » (...) J'me demandais si c'tait vraiment moi ou si c'était ce qui arrivait à tout le monde, si c'était normal.

Outre la déception encourue par ses faibles résultats scolaires, la confiance de Manelle avait été affectée par une prise de poids considérable qu'elle attribuait au stress. De surcroit, elle s'était sentie de plus en plus fatiguée et stressée dans le tumulte universitaire. Elle continuait d'assister à ses cours et faire les lectures et devoirs requis mais elle n'arrivait plus à concentrer, comprendre ou retenir les contenus de cours. Au moment des entrevues elle utilisait les termes « dépression » et « burnout » pour qualifier son malaise.

C'était rendu à un point que t'sais le matin j'me levais pas pour me mettre belle, j'me levais, j'm'habillais pis j'partais pour aller à l'école. Fait que ma confiance était vraiment pas là pis ma concentration était partie. (...) Moins confiante, déprimée pis

fatiguée. Fait qu'à l'école ça me tentait pu, comme j'étais en classe, j'étais pu capable d'arriver pis de comprendre.

Intervieweuse : Ok. Pis qu'est-ce qui faisait que tu te rendais quand même en classe? J'pense que j'essayais d'effacer le fait que ça marchait pas. J'me disais, j'vas à l'école, ça fonctionne, ça marche.

À travers cette crise, Manelle n'avait pas contacté les services de succès scolaires de son université. D'abord elle ne considérait pas que l'université avait le rôle de veiller à son bien-être émotionnel. De façon implicite, elle percevait que les étudiant(e)s devaient être autonomes dans leurs travaux comme dans leur cheminement. De plus, elle savait que son université offrait des services de soutien mais elle ne savait pas vers qui se tourner, quelles formes d'appui s'offraient à elle, et comment ces services pouvaient l'aider.

Suite à une hospitalisation, Manelle avait prit conscience qu'elle s'était poussée à bout et avait négligé sa santé. Elle avait consulté un psychologue et pris la décision d'abandonner ses cours de la session courante le temps de récupérer. Bien que cette décision soit réfléchie, elle eu une portée importante sur son cheminement académique. Ces échecs à de nombreux cours avaient abaissé sa MPC et un statut de probation avait été émis. Suite à cette épreuve Manelle avait bénéficié du soutien positif apporté par son psychologue ainsi que et par son copain et sa famille.

Malgré l'importance et la quantité des obstacles relatés dans son histoire, Manelle soulignait que, globalement, elle appréciait les études universitaires. Elle aimait particulièrement le sentiment d'accomplissement qu'elle ressentait lorsqu'elle remettait un travail ou complétait un examen. Malgré les difficultés, il avait toujours été clair pour elle qu'elle compléterait ses études.

Probation académique et programme d'accompagnement scolaire

Ses notes étant sous le minimum requis, Manelle avait été retirée de son programme d'études à la fin de sa deuxième année d'université. Elle avait fait un appel à l'aide du Centre de recours étudiant de son université et avait pu demeurer inscrite à son université tout en recevant le soutien académique du programme d'accompagnement scolaire.

Au moment de sa participation au programme, elle habitait avec son copain qui avait la garde partagée de son jeune fils. Manelle considérait que le soutien offert par le programme arrivait au bon moment en ce sens qu'elle se sentait mieux physiquement et mentalement. Elle avait beaucoup aimé transiger avec son accompagnatrice scolaire ce qui avait réanimé sa motivation pour les études. Avec son aide, Manelle avait révisé ses stratégies de travail, spécifiquement la prise de notes, les techniques d'études, la relaxation en préparation d'examen et finalement l'organisation incluant la gestion de temps et la priorisation de tâches, des apprentissages qu'elle jugeait très utiles et adaptés à ses besoins. De surcroît, elle considérait que le respect, la chaleur et la réceptivité que l'accompagnatrice affichait, ainsi que sa capacité de compréhension avaient été essentiels à son processus de reprise scolaire.

Tu y expliquais quelque chose pis elle le comprenait pis elle te démontrait peut-être une solution, différentes options que tu pourrais faire. Pis elle comprend la vie comme genre j'étais vraiment occupée avec le p'tit etcétera fait qu'elle a comprenait ça pis on travaillait tout autour de c'qui était plus important pour moi.

Résumé et issue

Manelle avait été une élève douée à l'école primaire et secondaire et avait été bien encadrée au cours de ce parcours. Elle pouvait compter sur la présence et le soutien de ses parents et entretenait des relations positives avec ses collègues de classe et ses

enseignant(e)s. Sa transition aux études universitaires avait été parsemée de défis, à savoir, des déménagements, un manque de soutien personnel et de liens avec la communauté universitaire, de la difficulté à maintenir le rythme universitaire, ainsi qu'une mauvaise préparation aux études postsecondaires. Ces obstacles ainsi que de faibles résultats scolaires avaient porté atteinte à sa confiance personnelle puis engendré des doutes concernant ses habiletés scolaires et un état d'abattement. Suite à ces difficultés, elle avait bénéficié d'importantes sources de soutien qui l'avaient aidée à retrouver sa confiance en elle-même. Elle avait accepté de participer au programme de soutien qui avait non seulement répondu à ses besoins mais l'avait aussi aidée à retrouver sa motivation pour les études. Lors de sa participation à ce programme elle avait suivi un cours qu'elle avait complété avec succès et avait pu continuer ses études en maintenant le statut de probation académique.

Appendix K: Eva's Profile

Eva was the third participant of this study. The researcher journal indicates that the conversations between Eva and I were pleasant. She also mentioned that she enjoyed our discussions. She was positive and talkative, volunteering details about various events and how she felt about them. From a research perspective, she shared valuable information regarding her experiences.

Eva was a student in the Department of Visual Arts. After her second year in university she had been withdrawn from her program of study as her CGPA was below the minimum required by her university. She was granted a final chance to register to her program of study if she accepted to receive adequate academic support through the ACP. While she participated in the program, she was pursuing her third year of study.

Family

Eva grew up in a traditional family unit, living with her mother, father, and older sister, Louise (pseudonym). Her parents were both involved in her education and instilled a discipline with regards to school and homework. Eva's mother was particularly present in Eva's school life guiding through school related experiences and personal matters such as friendship. At times, however, this involvement was excessive and overwhelming for Eva. Both her parents were artsy or "hands on" and introduced her to arts and crafts, which became a passion. Eva looked up to her older sister but often felt Louise overshadowed her. Her sister "*seemed to do well in all subjects*" and her parents expected Eva to follow in her footsteps.

Elementary school

School was generally enjoyable for Eva. She was eager to learn and particularly appreciated arts and crafts but remembers being shy and self-conscious. Social relations are

predominant in her stories. School friends were important in her life, specifically Amanda (pseudonym), her best friend since preschool. While some relationships were positive, she remembered being teased for being overweight in elementary school. She also experienced a few fallouts with friends, which were difficult for her. However, her relationships with teachers were generally positive.

High school

Eva attended a catholic arts high school. In her view, expectations in high school were not particularly high. She remembers it was “*easier for me to get by*” in high school but she worked hard when she needed to. Social relations remained important and she had a good group of friends for the better part of her high school years. However, she lost touch with many of them when she moved away to pursue university studies. Eva also esteemed many of her teachers and her involvement in school allowed her to create valuable relationships with school personnel, fostering her progress and transition to university.

University

Eva moved to a new city to study in the program of her choice. She shared an apartment style residence with three roommates and lived on her own for the first time. This living arrangement was less than ideal as she was easily distracted and had difficulty focusing and accomplishing work in the social and noisy atmosphere at home. She believed this contributed to her poor academic performance in first year.

I remember I would just leave and go to the library and stay really, really late. That was the only way I could get work done. (...) Like now I think back and I know that that was one of the reasons why I didn't do very well in my other classes in university.

In addition, her parents did not agree with her choice to move away from the family to study, which engendered a year-long conflict in the family. While juggling her transition to a new city and adapting to university life, Eva had to continually reassure her parents about her well-being. The focus being on the family's distress, it seems that Eva lacked some much-needed family support in this significant phase of her life. She believed that support from her parents, in the form of presence, acceptance, and encouragement would have made her transition easier.

I had to do a lot of reassuring. (...) So it was difficult because I was trying to ease in to a university career and then deal with my parents and my sister arguing back home. And that had a large effect on my studies.

After transitioning to university studies in a new city, Eva lost contact with many acquaintances but kept contact with significant friends. Studying in a small department made it easy to meet other students and make new friends. These friendships revolved around social and academic activities and became a good source of support for her *as she explained*.
“Um, I think it’s a healthy mix of social and school. (...) I definitely needed some support system as well.”

Upon her entry in university, Eva had felt excited and ready to begin post-secondary studies. In retrospect however, she acknowledged that she did not know what to expect from university or what was expected of her in this context. In first year, she struggled with the heavy workload, did not have a strong sense of autonomy, and prioritized her arts classes thus neglecting her electives. Reflecting on her first year experience she considered that she was not well prepared for university studies. She felt that her study and time management strategies were substandard.

When I applied I thought, you know, you're going to study art, that's all you got to worry about. I focused on my studios and then I realized that, you know, you have to get through the others as well.

Eva had anticipated that her time and efforts would mainly be dedicated to arts classes and projects. She realized with disappointment that she also had to focus a fair amount of energy to lecture-based electives. Concurrently, she became dissatisfied with her program because it did not meet her needs and interests and lacked facilities such as art galleries and equipment. She maintained a passion for arts but lost her enthusiasm, her motivation to work toward the completion of her program of study, and her eagerness to learn.

Um, I was really unhappy with the program. (...) I remember questioning, thinking, 'Am I in the right program?' But then I remember I told you I don't know what else I would want to study. Um, yeah, that's mainly what it was.

Eva indicated that she needed a mentor to guide her and convey what was expected of her in university. She also needed to acquire better study habits, ways to improve her concentration, managing and prioritizing her time. She did not seek help when she experienced academic difficulties because she felt embarrassed, inadequate and out of place. She did not turn to her academic secretariat for help because she felt a lack of involvement and sympathy from its personnel. She confided in one professor that she worried about her academic progress but was generally intimidated to approach professors for help. She vaguely knew that her university had an academic success service but did not visit it.

Well I have the agenda that they give out and there's advertisement all over there. And there's advertisement around campus too. (...) But I didn't think of doing it in first year.

Interviewer: Because you didn't think you were in trouble?

Yeah, I thought if I needed to see somebody, you know it would be really serious. (...)

I was embarrassed. So I didn't want to say anything.

Academic Probation and Support Program

Eva received a letter informing her that her CGPA was below the requirements of her university, leading to a withdrawal from her program. Allegedly, this was the first notification that she was facing serious academic difficulties. She was unaware of the regulation on good standing in her university or the consequences of falling under performance requirements and believed a warning would have pressed her to remedy the situation. It was difficult for Eva to accept a dismissal from her university, particularly because she had always been an eager and successful student. Facing this reality took an emotional toll on her. She was disappointed in herself and too embarrassed to confide in family or friends.

It was really hard for me at first. Um, and I noticed that I kind of held back from hanging out with my friends. (...) I wasn't really proud of myself. I wasn't really happy. I didn't want to spend time with people. Um, yeah it was really difficult. I stopped talking to my parents for a bit, just because I was so afraid of it coming out.

Eva was offered the possibility to participate in a companioning program with the status of academic probation. Her participation in this program was mandatory for her to register in her program. Nonetheless, she was happy to take part in it and knew she needed assistance to recover good academic standing.

Before participating in the program she felt depressed and was not certain she wanted to finish her undergraduate degree. After each session with her academic companion, she felt more confident, ready and eager to study. Specifically, she appreciated the structure of the

program (i.e., establishment of short-term and long-term goals, weekly meetings with the academic companion, and weekly reflective journaling) and the key strategies she learned (i.e., study strategies, reading strategies, understanding assignments and essay writing). Although she recognized that the purpose of the program was to impart students with tools and knowledge to become independent and successful, she would have enjoyed participating in the program for a full academic year instead of a single term.

Eva very much appreciated her academic companion. She felt comfortable talking to her and sensed she was open-minded and nonjudgmental. It was also clear to her that her companion was caring, dedicated, believed in the program, and genuinely wanted her students to acquire a strong and positive outlook on school.

And I just remember every time I'd meet her I'd be so refreshed. I had a class right after that and like, I was always looking forward to go to that class. Um, she gave me a lot of, a lot of good study tips. (...) Um, I remember I was having problems with my roommate at one point and she helped me out with that as well. Yeah, and um, it was something that I really needed cause I couldn't, I had never spoken to anybody else about it.

Summary and Outcome

Despite her parents' resistance, Eva moved away from her family to pursue post-secondary studies in the program of her choice. In addition to her parents' disapproval, she had faced a number of difficulties in university, such as a living arrangement not conducive to studies, being underprepared for university studies, and a surprising dissatisfaction with her program.

In the face of academic struggles, Eva did not seek the support available to her on campus because she only vaguely knew about success services, was not sure who to turn to,

and was embarrassed by her poor academic performance. Dismissal from her program of study had been a major setback for her and left her disappointed and humiliated. She had felt depressed and uncertain about completing her degree. She welcomed the opportunity to participate in the companioning program, appreciated its structure and enjoyed a positive relationship with an open-minded, caring, and dedicated academic companion. While participating in the support program, in the fall 2007 term, she had failed an additional course, which led to her withdrawal from her program of studies. At the time of the interviews, in the fall 2008 term, she was taking two classes as a special student with the hope to enhance her CGPA and be readmitted to the Department of Visual Arts. She then intended to pursue studies in fashion.

Appendix L: Le profil de Leena

Leena, la quatrième et dernière participante avait 22 ans et entamait sa deuxième année d'études. Mon journal de la chercheuse indique qu'elle s'exprimait de façon enthousiaste, assurée et franche. Elle passait facilement d'un sujet à l'autre au point où il était parfois difficile de suivre la logique des événements rapportés. Également, j'avais parfois l'impression qu'elle avait du mal à formuler ses idées.

L'étudiante avait été admise en septembre 2004 au Département de théâtre à la Faculté des arts. Sa MPC étant sous le minimum requis elle fut contrainte d'abandonner son programme d'études à l'été 2007. Elle obtint toutefois la permission de demeurer inscrite à son programme de baccalauréat en recevant un soutien académique à la session d'automne suivante.

Famille

Leena était originaire d'une région francophone dans une province majoritairement anglophone. Elle était enfant unique et expliqua que ses parents avaient toujours été impliqués dans sa vie scolaire. Ceux-ci n'avaient pas fréquenté le monde universitaire et elle ne considérait pas que ceci ait influencé pas son propre parcours. Elle souligna qu'ils étaient fiers de ses accomplissements ce qui semblait entraîner une certaine pression. *« J'sais pas, la façon que ma mère a parle de moi pis de mon éducation, je voudrais jamais la décevoir. »*

Sa description de sa communauté semble pertinente dans le profil de Leena. Elle considérait qu'il y avait un mal de vivre et décrivait diverses formes d'adversité comme un niveau de chômage élevé, de nombreux suicides dans son entourage, des problèmes d'alcool et de drogues notables, des grossesses non désirées chez les adolescentes de son école.

École élémentaire

À l'école élémentaire Leena se sentait bien entourée par de nombreux ami(e)s et cousin(e)s. « *J'avais pas besoin de me faire des amis, j'avais déjà ma gang (...) j'avais toujours ma famille à maison.* » Elle se décrivait comme une élève douée, indépendante et impliquée dans plusieurs sports et activités parascolaires. Elle gardait un bon souvenir de ses enseignant(e)s du primaire notant leurs habiletés pédagogiques. « *Sontait toute super positifs, ils savaient vraiment comment ressortir les qualités. J'ai été vraiment chanceuse d'avoir des vraiment bons profs.* »

École secondaire

Bien que talentueuse, Leena devenait éventuellement indisciplinée à l'école secondaire. « *Je me forçais pas plus qu'il fallait.* » Au niveau relationnel, elle se sentait toujours en terrain familier. Elle décrivait une amitié particulièrement solide avec sa copine Julie (pseudonyme) avec qui elle faisait la fête et expérimentait avec l'alcool et des drogues de plus en plus dures. « *Moi pis Julie on était ensemble tout le temps. On buvait tout partout, pis ça l'a augmenté dans les drogues, ça tombé dans tout.* » Son amie avait d'ailleurs fait une surdose, ce qui avait fortement marqué l'expérience de Leena et suscité une prise de conscience décisive. Elle estimait que ses enseignant(e)s du secondaire étaient compétent(e)s et souligna l'influence positive de deux d'entre eux qui l'avaient aidée à reprendre des habitudes saines et redoubler d'efforts pour réussir ses cours dans le but de poursuivre des études postsecondaires. Elle aborda également la place de la francophonie minoritaire dans son parcours secondaire. « *Oui, ils sontait très top, ah oui, nous autres là, la journée du drapeau, on est tout habillés en vert. (...) On est l'école qui a le plus d'esprit dans toute le centre.* »

Université

Leena s'était éloignée de sa ville natale pour entreprendre des études universitaires. Elle avait emménagé en résidence universitaire, ce qui, à son avis, lui convenait puisqu'elle savait prendre soin d'elle-même et n'avait plus envie de faire la fête contrairement à plusieurs de ses collègues de résidence. Il y régnait tout de même une atmosphère turbulente ce qui gênait sa capacité à étudier. Malgré l'éloignement, elle gardait un contact téléphonique régulier avec ses parents et sentait leur soutien et intérêt pour ses études. « *T'sais, juste le fait de questionner pis d'être obligé de répondre à tes parents, tu veux pas être obligé de répondre quelque chose qu'y veulent pas entendre ou être obligé de mentir donc, ça l'a une grande importance.* »

Aucun ami du secondaire n'avait entrepris de poursuivre des études dans la même ville qu'elle. « *Moi j'étais ici toute seule là. (...) Ça, ça me dérangeait pas.* » Bien qu'elle ait fait la connaissance d'autres étudiant(e)s en résidence, elle avait l'impression de ne pas avoir eu l'occasion d'intégrer le monde universitaire. Elle travaillait une trentaine d'heures chaque semaine pour subvenir à ses besoins ce qui d'un côté, l'avait épuisé et de l'autre, avait limité ses opportunités de prendre part à la communauté universitaire. De plus, il avait été difficile pour Leena de s'intégrer aux étudiant(e)s de son département. Par comparaison à ses collègues du même programme, elle jugeait qu'elle avait été mal préparée pour des études en théâtre et ne se sentait pas à la hauteur au plan théorique.

J'tais vraiment quelqu'un de comique mais en fait, quand ça venait pour faire des dissertations avec quelqu'un j'avais trop honte pour me mettre en groupe.

Intervieweuse : Ok. Tu te sentais pas forte?

Ah non. En fait de théorie moi je m'y connaissais pas.

Outre un manque de connaissances des contenus scolaires, Leena sentait que ses capacités linguistiques étaient défaillantes. Elle avait reçu de nombreux commentaires suggérant que sa grammaire était déficiente et encore, que ses compétences étaient inférieures aux attentes universitaires ce qu'elle considérait humiliant et occasionnait des doutes accaparants au sujet de ses capacités académiques. Ce cumul de facteurs jumelés à de faibles résultats scolaires faisait en sorte que Leena ne se sentait pas à sa place en contexte universitaire. « *Dès qu'j't'arrivée, c'était comme 'Oh my God! Moi j'vas me faire taper d'sus là.'* » Elle se faisait de plus en plus invisible en classe, trop intimidée pour poser des questions ou participer aux discussions. Elle avait éventuellement perdu le goût des études, mais, refusant d'abandonner elle persévérerait malgré les obstacles majeurs.

Le témoignage de Leena illustre qu'elle n'avait pas une conception claire des attentes universitaires. Elle a d'ailleurs noté qu'elle avait mis deux ans à comprendre ce qui était attendu d'elle et qu'elle avait beaucoup de mal à s'adapter au rythme et aux demandes universitaires. « *J'étais comme 'Wow, qu'est-ce qui se passe là?'* » Par ailleurs, elle expliquait que le rôle de l'étudiant universitaire était de saisir le style des professeurs pour répondre à leurs attentes spécifiques pour ainsi augmenter ses chances d'obtenir de bons résultats. Elle considérait que le monde universitaire était impersonnel et que sa valeur était directement liée à sa capacité de payer des frais de scolarité. Elle voyait l'université comme une industrie dans laquelle les étudiant(e)s étaient traités comme des numéros ce qui avait largement diminué sa motivation pour les études. « *On apprend pas (...) c'est plus ou moins de l'injection d'information pis du vomissage sur papier pis on n'a pas le temps de vraiment ambiber.* » Elle avait aussi eu de la difficulté à apprendre comment naviguer le système universitaire et connaissait mal les ressources et services disponibles sur le campus. Au moment des entrevues, son affiliation universitaire était strictement animée par le l'objectif

d'obtenir un diplôme. *« Je veux le morceau de papier. C'est la seule raison pourquoi j't'ici. »*

Un défi notable s'était ajouté au parcours de Leena. Une fracture au pied avait rendu ses activités quotidiennes particulièrement pénibles. Elle avait dû manquer plusieurs cours et n'avait pas senti l'appui de ses professeurs, de sa faculté ou de son université qui n'avaient alloué aucun sursis ou exception en regard des procédures d'abandon de cours. En raison d'abandons tardifs, elle avait faillit plusieurs cours ce qui avait fait chuter sa MPC

Lors de nos entretiens, Leena a cité peu d'expériences positives en contexte universitaire. Elle travaillait fort mais ses efforts rapportaient peu, elle se sentait exclue et peu soutenue. Par conséquent, sa confiance en elle et sa motivation étaient ébranlées. *« Depuis que j'suis à l'université j'ai perdu le vouloir de bien réussir pour moi-même. (...) Genre en 12^e année c'était comme, y'avait pas de question, que je faisais pas bien. »*

L'adversité vécue par Leena l'avait atterrée et à la fin de sa première année d'études elle avait décidé de voyager pour enrichir sa culture générale et vivre une expérience hors du commun. Elle était revenue avec une motivation renouvelée, se sentant d'attaque pour reprendre les études.

Intervieweuse : Qu'est-ce qui t'a poussé à partir en [voyage]?

Ouin, c'était juste j'étais, j'étais finie là, ça allait pas. Pis que je trouvais que tous les gens étaient beaucoup plus connaissant que moi, j'avais pas de bonnes opinions, j'avais pas beaucoup de vécu donc un matin j'ai dit 'Ah, j'm'en va acheter des billets d'avion'. (...) J'étais pu capable. Faillait j'aïlle trouver des ressources ailleurs. Faillait j'alle trouver une différente ouverture, fallait vraiment que je sache qui j'suis, de me trouver genre.

La participante jugeait que ses besoins concernaient principalement l'intégration au monde universitaire. Elle avait créé peu de relations significatives dans le milieu et connaissait peu les services qui s'offraient à elle. Elle considérait que sa fracture au pied avait limité ses déplacements et interféré avec ses activités académiques. Elle avait toujours eu l'intention de terminer ses études, et ce, malgré les obstacles multiples. Outre son désir de ne pas décevoir ses parents elle avait la nette impression qu'un diplôme universitaire était essentiel pour décrocher un bon emploi. De plus, elle refusait d'accepter la faillite et sentait l'obligation de terminer son baccalauréat étant donné le temps et l'argent qu'elle y avait investi.

Probation académique et programme de soutien scolaire

À son retour de voyage elle avait appris qu'elle devait se retirer de son programme d'études en raison de résultats scolaires sous les standards attendus. Suite à un appel, elle avait obtenu la permission de demeurer inscrite à son programme d'études en participant à un programme d'accompagnement. Consciente qu'elle avait grandement besoin de soutien, elle avait accepté cette condition.

Leena nomma bénéfices considérables liés à l'accompagnement. D'abord, elle avait ressenti peu d'empathie en contexte universitaire et l'appui personnalisé reçu dans le cadre du programme était encourageant. Aussi, son accompagnatrice l'avait aidé à faire le point sur sa réalité d'étudiante et l'avait informée des diverses ressources qui s'offraient à elle. « *A m'a faite réaliser que c'était pas normal la charge que je me mettais sur les épaules, financier, en fait de ma famille, vouloir atteindre un bac, pis être la seule dans ma famille, t'sais.* »

La relation d'aide dans le processus d'accompagnement avait été cruciale pour Leena. Elle avait particulièrement apprécié la personnalité de son accompagnatrice, les ressources

qu'elle offrait, ainsi que sa connaissance des services universitaires et son style proactif dans la facilitation de liens entre l'étudiant et ces services. Leena s'était sentie importante dans cette relation, ce qui avait alimenté sa confiance et son ouverture.

Tu rentrais dans salle pis c'était comme la matante t'avais pas vu ça faisait longtemps. Était trop géniale, l'ambiance, l'énergie qu'a dégagé, c'est juste contagieux (...) Pis aussi le fait que elle avait déjà des connaissances aux gens, aux aides financières toute ça, c'était vraiment, c'était comme, a m'a pris la main pis a m'a plus au moins 'Ok, je te passe la main à quelqu'un que moi je fais confiance et y vont t'aider c'est garanti'. C'était plus au moins une priorité, elle m'a donné des références tout partout, t'sais j'ai pas été obligée de m'expliquer 15 fois.

Résumé et issue

Leena se rappelait avoir été une élève forte à l'école élémentaire comme à l'école secondaire. Elle avait été soutenue et bien encadrée. Au secondaire, un accident avait servi de réveil et avait mis fin à ses comportements à risque. Elle avait été admise à l'université mais y avait vécu plusieurs difficultés liées à une préparation scolaire insuffisante, des rétroactions négatives de la part de certains professeurs et l'obligation de travailler de nombreuses heures pour subvenir à ses besoins. Malgré ses efforts, elle avait obtenu de faibles résultats scolaires et failli certains cours. Dans le processus, sa confiance avait été lourdement atteinte et elle avait l'impression de ne pas avoir sa place dans le milieu universitaire. Face à un retrait forcé de son programme de baccalauréat, elle refusait d'abandonner ses études. Le programme de soutien académique lui avait fait connaître de nombreux services d'appui de son université et lui avait permis de développer une relation d'aide significative avec son accompagnatrice. Au cours de la session d'automne 2007, elle avait suivi trois cours et en avait réussi deux. Elle avait été retirée de sa spécialisation en

théâtre mais demeurait inscrite au baccalauréat général. Au moment des entrevues, en novembre 2008 elle suivait des cours par correspondance. Elle souhaitait toujours compléter ses études de premier cycle et poursuivre avec un baccalauréat en éducation pour devenir enseignante.

Appendix M: Anny's profile

The fifth student to participate in this investigation was Anny, a 22-year-old student in her 4th year of studies. As noted in the researcher journal, the interviews were challenging in that the participant offered closed answers and gave few details when probed. I felt that she was hesitant to address personal or emotional aspects of her story. Overall, our discussions lent less depth of experience.

Admitted in the Faculty of Arts in September 2003, Anny was pursuing a General Baccalaureate. Although her CGPA was above the required minimum to be in good standing she had failed 18 course credits leading to her withdrawal. She reluctantly participated in the companioning program as a condition to remain registered in her program of study.

Family

Offering little detail on family life, Anny indicated that she grew up with both her parents and a younger brother in a traditional family unit. Neither her parents attended university. She sensed her parents wanted her to obtain a university degree although she never felt pressured to do so.

Elementary School

Anny qualified her experience in elementary school as ordinary and seemed somewhat indifferent with the experience as she stated: "*I didn't dislike going to school, I just didn't look forward to it.*" She was independent in her work and did not require much help from her parents or teachers. She had good friends but eventually lost touch with them. Her relationships with teachers were generally positive and she did not recall noteworthy events or experiences with friends or teachers.

High school

As was the case in elementary school, Anny believed her journey in high school was typical and uneventful. She transitioned at various times however; she integrated the French immersion program in grade 7, transitioned in high school in grade 9 and transferred out of the immersion program in grade 11. These changes were generally smooth and facilitated by her easily adaptable personality. Anny remained an independent student through high school, she worked well and obtained good grades.

Anny did not recall relationships with teachers or friends that were particularly meaningful. She had a good group of friends but had since lost contact with some of them. She shared however, that her transfer out of the French immersion program was due to a conflict of personality with a teacher.

I think it was just his teaching style like he was very 'You have to do it my way, sit, read these things, that's how you are going to learn' kinda thing. (...) I chose to not have that teacher the next semester.

University

Studying in a university close to home, Anny lived with her parents for the duration of her bachelor degree. She did not keep close contact with her high school friends through her post-secondary studies. She met other students in her classes but most of her friends were from other milieux.

Anny believed her transition to university was smooth. She had participated in the orientation activities which helped her understand the services and facilities offered to students and in keeping with her style, she was independent and worked well on her own. Not knowing what she wished to study, she registered in the Bachelor of Arts and took many electives in various disciplines to learn about different fields of study. Some elective classes

proved to be uninteresting and irrelevant to her academic path. Without interest, she did poorly in them but still “*stuck through*” instead of abandoning them. When she understood enough about her academic and career interests to transfer to a program of her choice, her grades were too low.

It was hard too like, at the beginning when I was trying to figure out what I wanted, and taking classes to see if they would interest me but it didn't so I didn't do very well in those. (...) I'm not really the type of person that, even though I'd really hate it, I'd still try my best.

Anny believed she adapted well to the university rhythm and workload. Even though she worked part-time for the duration of her university studies, she did not feel overwhelmed by the amount of work to be completed in her classes. She generally liked going to school and typically looked forward to the new school year every fall. Unfortunately, her motivation was eventually mitigated by classes she did not enjoy. She appreciated some of her classes and did well in them but the pleasant experiences were few and apart and she did not derive much enthusiasm from them. Eventually, she was mainly driven by a desire to merely finish her studies. “*At the end I didn't want to do it anymore, I was just sick of it. It was 'I'm just gonna finish it and move on'.*”

Contrasting with the discussion in which she said she adapted easily to university level workload, Anny confessed that she did not push herself enough to obtain satisfactory grades in all her classes, particularly those that were less interesting for her. High school work and demands had been relatively effortless for Anny and she had instinctively expected to be able to maintain a similar rhythm and level of effort in university. “*I think I wasn't being tough enough on myself like I guess cause everything was kind of easy for me in high school (...) It wasn't just happening anymore, I had to put more work into it.*” She also

indicated that although she had never needed this type of support before, being pushed by others (e.g., her parents) would have been beneficial in university.

Issues in Anny's personal life interfered with her ability to carry on her student activities. She offered little details of her personal life but shared that her mother was hospitalized in her second year, preventing her from focusing on university tasks. Seemingly, a number of factors affected her academic performance.

Interviewer: What led to you being placed on probation? Like you say you were sick of it, is that what happened?

I just sort of, I lost it. Like there were a couple of other things. [pause] Like last year, second year, my mother was in the hospital for a month in September, so, I didn't really do anything for that month and a little bit after, so I got behind and, I don't know if I was too stubborn to say I'll take a semester off, but I tried to do everything all at once kinda thing.

Anny described her university experience as unsatisfying and impersonal. “*Not just like for the administration part of it but the classes and stuff, most of ‘em are really big and, you just sit there, you show up every week, blend in, and everybody else does that.*” She had always understood that one's university experience was “*the best time of their life*” and had expected more from her post-secondary studies. In addition, she did not feel accomplished like she had expected to. She had lost her motivation and eventually, was solely looking forward to finish her degree and moving on.

In retrospect, she doubted pursuing university studies had been the right path for her. She thought perhaps, that a college program would have suited her more. Although she had not suffered direct pressure to attend university, she felt she conformed to the perceived esteem generally attributed to university studies, and gave in.

I woulda done things differently I probably wouldn't have gone to university I probably would have gone to college or something, cause that's just more who I am and more hands on and more real life things instead of theories.

Anny's needs in university mainly concerned an awareness of administrative procedures and requirements as well as a closer contact with her academic secretariat. She expressed that information about program transfers was difficult to find on the university website which had been a source of frustration for her. Arguably this information should have been obtained through her academic secretariat, which she chose not to consult. As well, she was not aware of the standards of academic standing. She knew her CGPA was well above the requirements of her program but did not realize that failing 18 course credits resulted in mandatory withdrawal. She was disappointed that her faculty did not attempt to communicate with her the seriousness of her situation. Allegedly, this would have allowed her to rectify the situation (e.g., abandoning classes she was not successful in). *"It would've been nice to have somebody say like 'You are two classes away from getting kicked out, just be aware of that' (...) When you don't know what you're looking for, it's hard to find it."*

When she encountered difficulties in university, she did not seek help from her faculty or the success services offered on campus. She knew her university offered academic support but did not visit those services. Seeing as she did not fully understand what her needs were, she did not know what and who to ask for help. She relied on her own resources to navigate the university world, which evidently were insufficient to allow her to remain in good academic standing. *"I didn't know that I needed help with (...) I didn't know what I was supposed to be asking for. "*

Academic Probation and Support Program

Anny received a notice of mandatory withdrawal from her program for having failed 18 credits as per her university's academic regulations. This came as a surprise to her and she experienced this situation with distress. She was frustrated that she had not been notified her of an imminent dismissal was displeased with the way withdrawals were handled in her faculty.

I got a letter in the mail in August saying 'You are no longer a student, we dropped all your classes for you.' (...) I called and said 'I want to discuss this' and in August, there were all the new students and they said 'Sorry our priority is the new students' and I just said 'I've been there for two years, paying all this money and now you won't even talk to me? (...) I was upset with that.

Anny reluctantly participated in the companioning program as a condition to remain registered in her program of study. Given that her classes had previously been abandoned for her and that many had limited enrolment, she had to choose classes based on availability rather than interest. This was a source of disappointment and frustration and it interfered with her motivation.

With regards to the usefulness of the companioning program, Anny believed that its structure and themes were suitable for new students and did not target her needs as a 3rd year student. Given that she was aware of her preferred study processes and techniques, she felt that the program was not particularly useful for her. She did however appreciate the weekly meetings with her academic companion as it helped her to be more organised. Additionally, she thought the goal setting activity was useful. She appreciated the reflective journaling but suggested that more reflection guided by the companion would have been beneficial.

Moreover, she suggested that the academic companion's assistance in critically looking back

on her university experience to face and understand the roots of her struggles would have targeted her needs. *“I needed the time and somebody to help me sort of gather my thoughts about it. And like, ask me the questions.”*

Summary and Outcome

Anny believed her transition to university went well. She worked independently and did enjoy some of her classes. However, she also experienced struggles in her university studies, such as her mother’s hospitalization as well as a lack of interest in some classes, of support, and of knowledge of academic procedures and requirements. She did not seek help when facing difficulties, as her needs were not clear to her.

With regards to the academic support program, Anny considered that it was not geared to meet her needs and would have benefited from more guided reflection. Being aware of her precarious situation during the fall 2007 term she pushed herself more, and passed all of her three classes. She followed and successfully completed an additional four classes in the winter 2008 while maintaining the status of academic probation. At the time of the interviews in the fall term 2008, she had satisfied the requirements of her program of studies and graduated.

Statement of contributions of co-authors

I have developed my thesis in the article format and have included five manuscripts in it. Articles 1, 2, 3 and 5 include Dr. Raymond Leblanc, my thesis advisor, as a second author. As the main author of the articles, my contribution as a Ph.D. candidate represents 95% of the manuscripts mentioned above. Specifically, I devised and proposed the theoretical and methodological frames, I collected and analysed the data, and I formulated the article themes, orientation, format, and text. Dr. Leblanc's contribution of 5% represents and acknowledges his reflections, which took the form of feedback, discussions, and brainstorming in the development of the thesis and its constituent manuscripts.