

Subject: Strategies for Learning
Interviewee: Dr. Ann Harrington
Interviewer: Tim Lacy
Time: 2:30 p.m.
Date: Thursday, September 26, 2002
Place: Harrington's Office (Crown Center, room 505,
Loyola University Chicago)
Transcriber: Tim Lacy

TRANSCRIPT

TL (Tim Lacy): This is September 26, Thursday, at about 2:30 [p.m.], in room 505 of Crown Center. This is Tim Lacy, and I am interviewing Dr. Ann Harrington about Strategies for Learning (SFL). Okay. Question one is: What do you recall of your overall experience with, uh, Mundelein College's Weekend College (WEC)? I guess, specifically, the Weekend College in Residence (WECR) – if you had any association with that.

AH (Ann Harrington): You mean, eh, 'teaching' in the [WEC]?

TL: Teaching, administration, um, whatever, you know, ...

AH: Right.

TL: ...whatever some of your big memories are.

AH: Well, uh, my biggest memories are of teaching. Um, I taught several history courses that I had taught during the day program, or that I had sometimes taught simultaneously. Um, [clears throat]. And what I remember most vividly, is, um, that the students in the [WEC] came in very [emphasis] ready to learn. They were very interested in the coursework. Um. There wasn't a lot of motivation – I didn't, I didn't need to try and provide, you know, motivate the students to learn. Um, and many of them doubted their own abilities. Um, it was, it was fun to watch them realize that they knew a lot and could produce a lot. Um, we always worked assignments. We had training sessions for people who were

going to teach in [WEC]. And those were held quite regularly so that you learned how to adapt your course to a three and a half hour time slot.

TL: And Mary Griffin conducted those trainings?

AH: Sometimes Mary Griffin, sometimes Bill Hill. Um, I don't recall anybody else conducting the workshops. But, they, they really did challenge us to, um, to think differently when we were teaching in that kind of format. And, one of the things that they always suggested was, before the class started, the students were given a pre-assignment. So that they came into class, the first session, having done some of the coursework. Be... Because many of these only met, especially in a class like history, would only meet five times in the ten-week session. It would be every other week. Occasionally there'd be a third week in there, for some reason or other. Um, but there wasn't, we only had those five three and a half hour time slots.

So an awful lot of the work was put on the students during the week. They had to do the reading, produce the papers, all of that kind of thing without a lot of in-class help. Um, but, what, what I discovered [clears throat], especially when I taught the same class in both [WEC] and weekday, I would say, almost without exception, the [WEC] students knew more at the end of that session than did the day students. Um, or, certainly produced papers that indicated that they seemed to have a better grasp of the material.

TL: And when you say 'day students' do you mean, um, actually during the day time or after work, like the 6 [p.m.] o'clock slot for classes?

AH: Oh, I didn't have any, I didn't have any of those. I only had day classes. Uh, so they were all traditional age, undergraduate students during the day, and then, um, in many cases, well, in all cases they were older students in the [WEC]. Because we didn't allow

students, unless they were highly [emphasis] motivated students, we didn't allow students to take [WEC] classes because most of them couldn't handle the timeframe.

TL: Okay, and, um, how long did you teach in the [WEC] as opposed to the, the regular college? Were you teaching in one before the other? Did you teach at the same time in both of them?

AH: I taught at the same time in both of them. I never had a full weekend schedule.

TL: And you began at Mundelein in seven...?

AH: 1969.

TL: '69. [Pause] I knew it was, uh, I knew it was a while back. And then I had seen like, for one year you were on a leave and, and Dr. [Prudence] Moylan was the interim department chair for a year, or something like that.

AH: Oh, uh- hum.

TL: So, I noticed that you had been there for quite a while.

AH: Right, I was on leave from '72 to '75, I think, to work on my Ph.D. So, I came back to Mundelein after the start of [WEC].

TL: That's interesting. You were, here you are away, and then you came back and there's this new, you know, ...

AH: [chuckle]

TL: ... interesting business going on.

AH: Right. It was very, uh, it was exciting.

TL: Okay, um, I'll go ahead and move, that's good, I'll move on to the next question. Um. What was your experience with the course Strategies for Learning (SFL)?

AH: Well, I started teaching it in the weekend [WEC], um, with Mary Griffin and Mary de

Cock, um, Michael Suka [spelling?], who's is the [unclear] Suka here at Loyola. Uh, uh, I forget, I think there were five or six of us the first time I taught it. And, um, that also was a fascinating experience. Mary Griffin designed the course, and the first time I taught it with her, I think, maybe, the theme was always, um, women. Because most the [WEC] students were women. There were some men, but, uh, the bulk of them were women, as I recall. Uh, it was, it was a fascinating course because we spent a lot of time as a committee meeting, um, deciding, well, first of all, before the class started, deciding what books we would read. So, we'd have to kind of s-skim the books quickly and then meet and decide whether we wanted to use those books. Um, and do you want me to talk specifically about what I remember?

TL: Um, I was thinking, um, you could elaborate on special student situations or, um, you know, what, what you f-feel like the students got out of the course. For instance, Prudence Moylan, um, indicated that she felt like that, even if the course wasn't a success individually for each student, in that they learned their learning style, there, there was a certain social aspect.

AH: Oh, yeah.

TL: ... to the course...

AH: Uh hum.

TL: ... you know, that was very helpful to the students. An accl., an acclie, acclieimi... I can't even say the word! Acclimatizing? [chuckle]

AH: Oh, climating?

TL: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

AH: Yeah.

TL: So, um, ...

AH: Yes, I would, I would agree with all of that. They, uh, I had forgot about... I don't know if, if the learning, I guess that was a part of [SFL]. They did do an "inventory" [Learning Style Inventory] to find out what their own learning, um, abilities were.

TL: And then they did each section, they, they started of with the, I'm just jogging your memory here.

AH: Yeah.

TL: The, the *How to Read a Book* (HTRB) section,

AH: Uh hum.

TL: ... When they paired it with Freud's *Civilization...*

AH: Right.

TL: ... *and Its Discontents* (CID).

AH: Uh hum.

TL: And, then the, uh, autobiography at one point.

AH: [simultaneous] Uh hum. Yeah, they had to write their own.

TL: ...The library search,

AH: Uh hum.

TL: The...Um, um. Yeah, it, um, maybe this jogs you?

AH: Yes, well it does because, um, I mean, the part that I [pause] remember being so useful to so many students was the [HTRB] part. Because, many students, I think again, coming in as adults think, they distrusted their own learning. Not all, but many in those early years because they had been out of school for so long. Um, and just having a very concrete [emphasis] plan of how you approach a book was, for many of them, quite a learning

experience. And, I have to say [chuckles], for myself. Um, I found it helpful, even though I had just finished my Ph.D. Um, ...

TL: Isn't that interesting?

AH: I think, I think I learned some of it by the seat of my pants. I don't think I want you to quote that [tongue-in-cheek]! But, um, then actually seeing, I hadn't ever seen his method before. And it really was quite helpful. In, in terms of really [emphasis] getting at 'what is this author trying to say?' And being able to summarize it in a very succinct manner.

TL: Um, this is kind of getting into the, um, next question a little bit, but do you remember any particular, this is digging deep, but do you remember any particular student responses to that, that first section? You know, whether it helped them with Freud, or not, or if it's something they came back to you with later. You know, any sorts of reinforcement that you got as a instructor on what you were doing?

AH: [long pause, paper shuffle]. No, I can't, uh... Well, the only thing that I remember, but this wasn't in the [WEC]. This was when we brought it into the day college.

TL: That's fine, actually.

AH: Is that okay?

TL: Yeah.

AH: And we were using, we were doing the women's theme again. And, I don't know if I told you this? Um, Phyllis Schlafly. Did I tell you that? ...And a Wisconsin state representative, I think, um, a woman, were going to be debating the Equal Rights Amendment [ERA] – that the women's groups were asking for at that point. They were

going to be debating it over at Northeastern [Illinois University]. Univer? What is that?
 What was it? I think it's Austin. Northeastern University.

TL: Over on, uh, St. Louis [Ave.]?

AH: Yeah. Right.

TL: Yeah.

AH: And, so, we thought, wouldn't that be fun to take the whole [SFL] class over there? And now, now I don't remember how we all got over there, but, anyway, we did. We all went over there. And, uh, at the end of the debate, when we came back to talk about it, the students were swayed to Phyllis Schlafly, and against the [ERA]. Which was not exactly our plan! [chuckles].

And, what I remember so clearly is, uh, when we got them to really use the method in [HTRB], um, to analyze the essay, and, uh, to analyze the arguments of Phyllis Schlafly and Midge [spelling?], somebody, Midge? I forgot her name. But, Wisconsin representative. Um. [pause]. We, they came to realize that, uh, Phyllis Schlafly came like she was very cool, very collected, looked terrific, um, and very emotional - in terms of, you know, '[if] we have this [ERA], women are going to have to fight in [war] ...

TL: A rhetorician, I guess you could say?

AH: Yeah. She was good. She was a very good speaker. And, uh, talked about all the horrible things that would happen if we had this [ERA]. This congresswomen from Wisconsin was very [emphasis], very clear, um, ordered speech. Not real emotional. Um, very reasonable speech. And the students fell for the emotional one. Um, because when they did sit down and analyze what she was saying they realized that Phyllis Schlafly really did not have a lot of support behind what she was saying. She wasn't

really proving her point. Whereas the congresswomen, when you really took the arguments apart, was proving her point. And, it was an awakening. Now, and not all the students ended up being swayed back the other way. But, um, at least they saw, when you looked at the, what she said, how she supported it, and the documentation, there's no way that the Wisconsin congresswomen didn't win the debate.

TL: Sounds like it was a great, you know, relevant example – learning tool for the student. That'd be perfect for, even if they didn't come back with the ex ... result that you expected, it was a great tool to use for, probably for the rest of the class [rest of the term], I'll bet.

AH: Right.

TL: But, you know, aspects of that would come up.

AH: Well, and I'm not sure that we expected them all to be swayed one way or the other. I think we were just surprised that they were, almost to a person, swayed to Phyllis Schlafly [chuckles].

TL: Oh.

AH: I think we, I don't know what we expected. I think, I think we thought, 'of course they'll see the reason.' You know, of course they would want the equal rights. And, then, that ...

TL: It's sort of like, 'duh!' They, they would, you know, the facts are there. This is reasonable and rational, rational. That's interesting. That's very interesting.

AH: It was, it was a fascinating afternoon.

TL: Um, [pause]. I'll back up a little bit. Do you feel like the Adler book succeeded in helping them understand Freud's book?

AH: I think it did. Um. It did in the sense that, even if they did not succeed right off in being able to do, you know, to capture everything, in terms of, I forget how it works. But, what does the title mean? And, then, you look at each...

TL: Reading from the whole to the parts, and the parts to the whole,...

AH: Right. Right.

TL: ... and then analyzing the argument.

AH: And then being able to say, you know, in a paragraph, what this book was really about. Um, I think that was probably the most challenging for them to do. But, once they could do that, then I think they began to see how books are put together. How you can summarize the basic argument, and really understand what the author is trying to do. And then, in each chapter, show how it's developed. I really do think that by the time they completed all those stages, [be]cause they came in stages, as I recall. You know, they were, they'd hand in, um, I think one assignment was, write this.

TL: Yeah, I think there were two stages ...

AH: [interrupts] Yeah.

TL: ... to that first assignment. Um, from my research I, when I was looking over the syllabus from that class, I think they, you, the instructors talked a little bit about the method, uh, in the first session.

AH: Uh hum [affirmation].

TL: And, uh, um, they either went and did their other classes on Saturday and then were expected to read a little more for Sunday. Or, it might have spilled over into the, the next time on the Friday.

AH: Oh, that's right.

TL: [Interviewer speaks louder, but simultaneous with interviewee] But I think it was all covered ...

AH: This was a ... they did meet a couple of time on the weekend. I forgot about that it.

TL: Um.

AH: This was a little different timeframe.

TL: Oh, okay. I was, yeah, I guess we were mixing there a little bit. Because you said you were reflecting on your day.

AH: Right.

TL: But then

AH: The one was a day, one was a diff... . But, the weekend, I did [unclear] did meet a couple a times. Friday night, Sunday morning, or something, I can't remember.

TL: Um.

AH: But they, there was a chance for ... [telephone rings] ... them to, to share their learning, and then discover ... [rings again.]

[I stopped the tape and Dr. Harrington answered the phone. The interruption lasted three to four minutes before the interview resumed.]

TL: Okay. Um. One more about the, [HTRB].

AH: Uh hum.

TL: And, if you don't have an answer to this, it's completely fine. Do you recall any differences in how male or female students reacted to the book?

AH: [Pause, about four seconds] No. I don't have any recollection of that at all.

TL: And I understand, because I know that male students were like ten percent of the population at any given point.

AH: Right.

TL: So, it's a shot in the dark.

[Both AH and TL laugh simultaneously]

TL: Okay. Um, last question or two. Do you have any recollections of the effectiveness of other [SFL] modules? [Pause.] Such as the autobiography and, you know, those other, um, lessons that, uh, the course was, that were involved in the course.

AH: I think the, um, eh, as I recall, the autobiography was an important element because it allowed the students to, talk about where they were coming from and, just what was going on in their lives. And, it was very helpful for the advisor, as I recall. When, when the advisor met with them, and talked about the autobiography. Um. It seemed to me that that was a meaningful experience for the students that, as I recall. And, a help to the faculty member [chimes in the background from Loyola's Madonna Della Strada chapel], in terms of getting some kind of sense of what the interests of these students were, and where they hoped to be going with their education.

TL: Yeah. Wasn't it like the last, maybe, lesson in the course, was, was actually meeting with one of the faculty members and coming up with a, a plan of what you want to do.

AH: Right. Uh hum.

TL: I think that was a, a module at the, the very end. Sort of the 'Summum Bonnum' of the course, or whatever. [Laughs]

AH: Right, and it, and it, I think it forced the students to really examine why they were going

back to school, and what they really did hope to get out of all of this. And then that helped the faculty member, in turn, in, if, if the student was looking for any advice. This provided an avenue for the faculty member to make some suggestions. And also it created bonds, I think, where people got know each other better.

TL: Which corroborates what, um, a couple of others have, have mentioned in their interviews: that the course really, almost had a more social than educational function. I mean, clearly, there were these educational components to it, ...

AH: Right.

TL: ...but this, um, "climatizing" them to the college environment seemed to be an important part of the whole [picture].

AH: Right, well, and the other thing, I think, was that [it] helped them form bonds. This is not related to anything you are asking, but [chuckle]... . When we moved over to Loyola and we tried to keep it going for a year or two, um, I mean they tried to hold onto some of the weekend classes, one of the things that didn't, wasn't possible was eating together in the dining room. Which was a big [emphasis] thing for the weekend students. Um. Going there for breaks, going there for lunch. There was a place where they could congregate.

When we came over to Loyola they had us all over the place, um, in classrooms all over the place. And, there was no food service, I don't think, and, oh, the food service stopped in the, in Sky [the Skyscraper Building]. And, um, that was, that was a big [emphasis] loss, because they had no where to congregate. So [unclear] a community definitely did build up, of [WEC] students. And especially through the residents. Many, many of them lived on campus, so, um.

TL: So, combined with living here a couple of nights on the weekend, eating together, and,

and, [in] the very beginning at least, taking ...

AH: [simultaneous] Having a common course.

TL: ... a course together.

AH: Uh hum.

TL: I mean, their first semester they really were, uh, just kind of a forced community, but, but, clearly welcome also, apparently. I haven't heard anything negative about [the students living together].

AH: No, and I, for me, it was a learning experience there too. Because I wouldn't have predicted, I wouldn't have known, that adult students would want that kind of thing. Uh, and maybe they didn't know they did either? But, they, uh, like you, I never heard anyone complain about it. They really seemed to form some very [emphasis] strong bonds and friendships here. Whereas normally they would be coming as an adult, all by themselves, knowing nobody. And I suppose that's true of some undergraduate students, but they can, well, they live in dorms too, and they eat together. Um, that's how they get to know each other. If they didn't have that, the adult students would have been just all by themselves. It would've been hard to form those bonds. Maybe within a class they could've done it?

TL: And that depends on the way each instructor would, would structure the class. [Be]cause if they're just lecturing, ...

AH: Right.

TL: ...then the students show up, and then they leave, and they don't, ...

AH: Right.

TL: ... they never meet anybody.

AH: Uh hum.

TL: So ...

AH: Yeah. It's, it's the whole notion of creating some kind of community. [Unclear]. Well, and especially with these adult students, they were coming right out of the, most of them, right out of the work world. And, like I said, many of them did not know how talented they were. And so, getting together with other students gave them at least the confidence to keep coming back. And, um, I, I think it was a [chuckle] wonderful, a wonderful invention. It did, it was a format that hit [AH hits desk for emphasis] their lives, and gave them the degree they needed.

TL: Um, you've kind of done this on your own maybe, but: um, any final thoughts, eh, from a, another angle that I haven't asked you on? Just about the [WEC] in residence, or the class [SFL], or the book [HTRB], or anything, anything that I haven't asked you?

AH: Well, I think the thing that, that continues to amaze me, is the wisdom behind putting this whole thing together. And really catering to a group of students that, um, [pause] who might not have pursued the whole degree if they had not had this kind of support, and this kind of program, that really under..., tried to understand where they were coming from, and what they needed to get there - to get to their end goal of a degree. Um.

And I think, I think it's made me sad to watch Loyola kind of dismissing all that learning. And now, I mean, I think, as of this year, all the Mundelein College students are just merged in [to Loyola]. Which is fine, if they still provided the special services that those students might need. But, they don't. Um. So, there's no attempt to cater to the adult student that I can see. Except, maybe, the B.G.I.S. [Bachelor of General and Integrative Studies] degree, which is, I don't, I mean, I ... suspect that it's not looked at

with great resp[ect]. [chuckles] I suspect it's academic character is somewhat suspect by many faculty. I, I don't know that. I, re... That's a, that's a suspicion.

TL: Okay. Um. We'll call that a, we'll call that a wrap ...

AH: [Chuckles] Okay.

TL: ... for the, for this part.

[End of interview]

[Side two is empty]