









Exploring The Events That  
Engage Graduate Students In  
Transformative Learning

Deborah Mindorff, B.A.

Department of Graduate and Undergraduate  
Studies in Education

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Faculty of Education, Brock University  
St. Catharines, Ontario

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## **Abstract**

This research explored the events that engaged graduate students in transformative learning within a graduate program in education. This context was chosen because one objective of a graduate program is to facilitate critical thinking and transformative learning. The question of how adult learners perceive and experience learning steered the direction of this study. However, the purpose of this research was to study critical incidents that led to profound cognitive and affective changes as perceived by the graduate students. Specifically, the questions to be answered were what critical incidents happened to graduate students while in the Master of Education program, how were the incidents experienced, and what transformation resulted?

The research design evolved over the course of a year and was highly influenced by previous empirical studies and criticisms of transformative learning theory. The overall design was qualitative and phenomenological. A critical and interpretive approach was made to empirical data collected through a critical incident questionnaire and in-depth interviews. Inductive analysis allowed theory to be built from the data by making comparisons. New questions emerged and attention was given to social context, the passage of time, and sequence of events in order to give meaning and translation of the participants' experiences and to build the interpretive narratives. Deductive analysis was also used on the data and a blending of the two forms of analysis; this resulted in the development of a foundational model for transformative learning to be built.



The data revealed critical incidents outside of the graduate school program that occurred in childhood or adult life prior to graduate school. Since context of individuals' lives had been an important critique of past transformative learning models and studies, this research expanded the original boundaries of this study beyond graduate school to incorporate incidents that occurred outside of graduate school. Critical incidents were categorized into time-related, people-related, and circumstance-related themes. It was clear that participants were influenced and molded by the stage of their life, personal experiences, familial and cultural conditioning, and even historic events.

The model developed in this document from an overview of the findings identifies a four-stage process of life difficulty, disintegration, reintegration, and completion that all participants' followed. The blended analysis was revealed from the description of how the incidents were experienced by the participants. The final categories were what were the feelings, what was happening, and what was the environment? The resulting transformation was initially only going to consider cognitive and affective changes, however, it was apparent that contextual changes also occurred for all participants, so this category was also included. The model was described with the construction metaphor of a building "foundation" to illustrate the variety of conditions that are necessary for transformative learning to occur. Since this was an exploratory study, no prior models or processes were used in data analysis, however, it appeared that the model developed from this study incorporated existing models and provided a more encompassing life picture of transformative learning.



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I heard a saying just recently concerning the creation of knowledge, “We stand on the shoulders of giants.” Certainly, this study has been built upon the work of many others, as is evident from the references. However, the author wishes above all to acknowledge the Biblical injunction and challenge of transformative learning:

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” Romans 12:2 (NKJV).



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
List of Tables.....	x
List of Figures .....	xi
<b>CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction.....	1
Background to the Problem.....	2
Statement of the Problem Situation.....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	4
Questions to be Answered.....	4
Rationale.....	4
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Importance of the Study.....	10
Parameters of the Study .....	11
Glossary of Terms.....	12
Organization of the Document .....	14
<b>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Organization of the Present Chapter .....	17
Transformative Learning and Adult Education.....	18
Historical Background of Transformative Learning Theory.....	19
Overview of Transformative Learning Theory .....	22
Unresolved Issues related to Transformative Learning Theory.....	26
Empirical Studies of Transformative Learning .....	38
Summary .....	41
<b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES .....</b>	<b>43</b>
Overview .....	43
Research Design.....	44
Description of Research Methodology and Approach .....	46
Instrumentation (Description).....	46
Design of the Questionnaire and Interview Questions.....	49
Pilot Study.....	51
Selection of Participants.....	51
Procedures.....	52
Data Collecting and Recording .....	53



Data Processing and Analysis.....	54
Methodological Assumptions.....	55
Limitations.....	56
Ethical Considerations.....	57
Restatement of the Problem.....	58
Summary of the Chapter.....	59
<b>CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>61</b>
Overview of the Chapter .....	61
Who are the Graduate Students?.....	62
What Were the Critical Incidents? .....	70
Time-Related Critical Incidents.....	71
People-Related Incidents.....	83
Circumstance-Related Incidents.....	93
Summary of Direct Circumstance-Related Incidents.....	97
Summary of Indirect Circumstance-Related Incidents.....	101
How Were the Incidents Experienced?.....	104
Emotional Responses.....	104
Analytical Cognitive Responses.....	111
What Transformation Resulted?.....	118
Cognitive Changes.....	118
Affective Changes.....	133
Contextual Changes.....	143
Interpretation of the Findings.....	149
<b>CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>156</b>
Summary .....	156
Discussion.....	160
Implications .....	178
Final Thoughts .....	189
References.....	193
Appendix A: Questionnaire .....	220
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	222
Appendix C: Cover Story.....	224
Appendix D: Member Check and Demographic Questionnaire.....	229
Appendix E: Informed Consent Form.....	230
Appendix F: Critical Incident Data .....	232



## List of Tables

Table 1: Critical Incidents: Potential Learning Outcomes	9
Table 2: First Critical Incident and Trigger	232
Table 3: Second Critical Incident and Trigger	233
Table 4: Overview of the Findings	155



## List of Figures

<i>Number</i>	<i>Page</i>
Figure 1: Components that play a role in transformative learning	7
Figure 2: Model within individual life and learning context	36
Figure 3: Transformative learning conceptual model	37



## **CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM**

### **Introduction**

This was an exploratory study of the events that engage graduate students in the process of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1977). The objective of a graduate program is to facilitate critical thinking and transformative learning for the graduate student (Brookfield, 1988, 1990; Mezirow, 1990; Peters, Jarvis, & Associates, 1991). The term “transformative learning” used in this study follows Cranton’s (1994b) definition: “as the development of revised assumptions, premises, ways of interpreting experience, or perspectives on the world by means of critical self-reflection” (p. xii).

At the graduate level, this process can begin when students realize that they are moving away from “subject-oriented and person-oriented” learning (Cranton, 1994b; Habermas, 1971), which are based on the obtaining of facts and skills and the needs of the individual respectively. Mezirow (1991) argues that this movement is a preliminary step toward emancipatory learning, which is viewed as a social expression of transformative learning. Both transformative and emancipatory learning can occur without the help of an educator, but they require a deliberate will on the part of the learner, to question unexamined assumptions and beliefs. This process usually involves altering these assumptions and beliefs, which can be seen in action-based change, for an individual and societies (Friere, 1970; Mezirow, 1990, 1995). In this way, transformative learning is often associated with emancipatory learning. However, emancipatory learning



is generally more concerned with large social movements while transformative learning is more concerned with personal and individual growth and learning (Dirkx, 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1998).

### **Background to the Problem**

Graduate programs invite students to participate in transformative learning. Ziegahn (1998) suggests that “adult learners generally come to graduate school to find the words and the theories to help them better understand their practice and potentially, to transform the way they think about themselves, their work, and their intentions” (p. 295). Cranton (1994b) describes the process of transformative learning as “examining, questioning, validating, and revising perceptions” (p. 26). The process involves reflection and examination of prior learning where previous interpretations of life experiences and perspectives are integrated with new knowledge and skills (Cranton, 1994b). Graduate students move away from instrumental learning, which Habermas (1971) describes as learning to control the environment, and learn why they think in a certain way, what theoretical basis there is for their thinking in that way, and how they might push that thinking to higher levels (Chene, 1988; Elsey, 1982; Woodley, & others, 1987). Universities, therefore, are considered good places where a transformation of perspectives can be fostered (Ziegahn, 1998).

One way to explore the process of transformative learning is through the writing of critical incidents. Brookfield (1990) describes these as “cross sectional snapshots of vividly remembered highs or lows” (p. 35). Critical incident writing causes students to reflect on their learning and asks them to recall specific events rather than general



information. Reflection is a necessary component of writing critical incidents. Reflective learning becomes transformative learning when assumptions and premises are assessed and found to be “distorting, inauthentic, or otherwise invalid” (Mezirow, 1991a, p. 6). Transformative learning can be hindered because of the comfort and safety afforded by filtering experiences through individual meaning perspectives, as opposed to moving toward a “more inclusive, differentiated, open, and integrated meaning perspective” (Cranton, 1994b, p. 28).

### **Statement of the Problem Situation**

There are a number of problems that arise when considering how graduate students engage in transformative learning. For example, a considerable number of questions exist in the literature as to why some people experience transformative learning and others do not (Taylor, 1998). These questions center on the influences of individual contextual factors on adult learning (Clark & Wilson, 1991), diverse cultural backgrounds (Bailey, 1996; Elias, 1993; Pope, 1996, as cited in Taylor, 1988), and different developmental stages in adulthood (Tennant, 1994).

Other questions have to do with fostering transformative learning in practice. For example, what is the role of the instructor? What effect does the classroom environment and timing have within a graduate program? Should a graduate program, or an instructor in a graduate program, seek transformative learning as a learning outcome for students? If so, how can that best be facilitated? Since transformative learning often involves exploring underlying assumptions to thoughts, how do educators get adults to reflect and share their feelings? What risks are involved? Who is to say a person has been transformed? These



questions seem to indicate that there is still much that is unknown about transformative learning.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study investigated the events that engaged graduate students in transformative learning in a Master of Education program at a Canadian university. This study was concerned with any critical incident that led to profound cognitive and affective changes as perceived by the graduate student. This research contributes to a larger group of studies that examines how adult students perceive and experience learning (e.g., Brookfield, 1990; Entwistle & Ramsden, 1983; Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984).

### **Questions to be Answered**

The focus of this research was on events that engaged graduate students in transformative learning. That is, what critical incidents happened to graduate students while in the Master of Education program, how were the incidents experienced, and what transformation resulted?

### **Rationale**

My reasons for doing this study are both personal and professional. From a personal standpoint, I became aware of my own transformative learning that had taken place over the past year while I was in a graduate program and I could easily identify several critical incidents and their triggering events. The critical incidents all centered on assignments involving intensive journal writing that required reflection and critical analysis of my personal perspective and assumptions. I recognized, after reflection,



triggering events that started the process of transformative learning. These were times when I said to myself, “AHA!” as Brookfield (1990) suggests, or in more colloquial terms, the times when the light bulb went on in my head and I began to move in a different direction. These critical incidents resulted in identifiable changes in my behaviour, relationships, and choice of thesis topic and research interests.

From a professional standpoint, my interest in adult education caused me to wonder if other graduate students experienced similar transformative learning. If so, what were the critical incidents or triggering events that stood out in their minds? I wondered if their experience of transformative learning was similar to mine, was different from mine, or if they experienced any transformation at all. This inquiry follows Wolcott’s (1995) assertion that all cases are in certain aspects like all other cases, like some other cases, and like no other cases. In that regard, I was interested in how this in-depth case analysis could inform the field of adult education.

Taylor’s (1998) review of 45 empirical studies on transformative learning indicated the breadth of application to which transformative learning theory has been applied. However, I was both shocked and surprised not to find any study done with graduate students. The need for more diverse applications of study, particularly within formal education, was both evident and succinctly expressed in Taylor’s (1998) review:

Lastly, before linking transformative learning to other fields and cultures, it needs to be firmly established in its own right, as a viable theory of explaining how adults learn. This means that more hard research needs to be conducted in a variety of settings to validate the significance of its various premises. (p. 31)



It seemed reasonable to investigate the transformative learning experience of graduate students within the field of education in order to understand what the critical incidents were that led to transformation, to assess how the incidents were experienced and facilitated, and to examine what resulted from the transformative learning.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Based on the preliminary literature review, five major components surfaced as major role players in engaging adults in transformative learning. These components are: philosophies of education, theories for teaching, individual factors, instructional environments, and learning outcomes. The components are presented in graphic representation (see Figure 1) and initially provided a conceptual framework for this study. In Figure 1, is one example of a progression, which begins with philosophies of education and ultimately culminates with critical incidents as potential outcomes. The first component, philosophies of education, is the foundation for the second and third components, theories for teaching and individual factors. There are continued connections between theories for teaching and the instructional environments, as well as connections between individual factors and learning outcomes. All of these components are seen as influencing one another and as being interrelated to one another. This framework represented a beginning point for thinking about this particular research project.



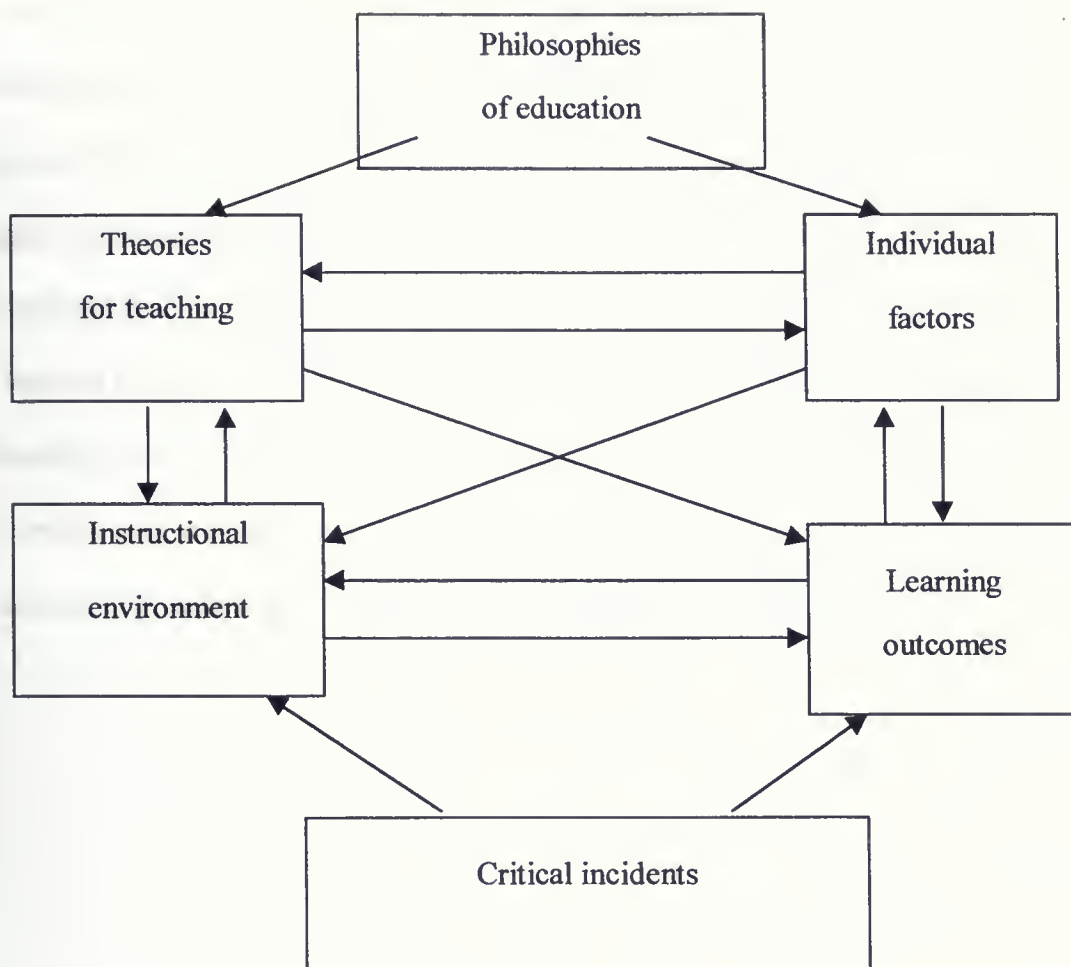


Figure 1.

Components that play a role in transformative learning.



Critical incidents described in this study represent events that engaged students in transformative learning and could be considered as potential learning outcomes. Critical reflection was required from the participants to answer the questionnaire and interview portion of this study. The critical incident questionnaire was intended primarily to generate an understanding of what critical incidents happened (construct), how they happened (triggering events—positive or negative), and what resulted from the incidents (learning outcomes—cognitive and affective awareness and development). This is displayed in Table 1 and is explained in detail later. The interview questions were intended to generate a deeper understanding of what individual factors such as prior learning and contextual factors might have influenced the critical incidents.



Table 1

Critical Incidents: Potential Learning Outcomes

Construct	Outcome
Triggering Event	Positive
	Negative
Learning Outcome: Change in Meaning	Cognitive awareness & development
Perspectives	Affective awareness & development
Individual Factors: Prior Learning	Identification
	Validation
	Analysis/Evaluation



### **Importance of the Study**

This research will be of interest to three distinct groups: graduate students, university and other adult education instructors, and administrators of adult education programs. For students, this study can help them to understand the purpose and process of graduate studies. It can make them more cognizant of their own learning triggers and help them to identify critical incidents. This can lead to the development of a personal belief system of learning within the philosophies and theories of adult education, teaching strategies, and instructional environments. I suspected that the background context of the graduate student played a much greater role in their graduate experience than was recognized at the university. It was hoped that a new practice would emerge out of the study that would help students entering the graduate program to assess their background and identify what they bring to the program.

For instructors of adult education, university graduate courses in particular, this study can provide insight into the triggering events or critical incidents and subsequent patterns of adult learning that can be incorporated into teaching strategies in the classroom. It can also reveal to instructors and to administrators of graduate programs the importance and significance of student context, instructional environments, and learning outcomes. These elements are also relevant to curriculum development, entrance and exit requirements, and evaluation techniques, particularly teaching practices.

This study was intended as a generative phase with which to build theory or to determine if the nature of this phenomenon was too idiosyncratic to allow for theory



building. Regardless of the outcome, it was anticipated that this study would have implications for further research in a number of different ways. First, and in the most general sense, it could add to the existing knowledge of the transformative learning phenomenon and therefore contribute relevance to understanding the development of the adult learner, teaching theories and strategies, and existing philosophies of education.

Second, and more specifically, the components that emerged as being important to transformative learning would need to be tested across a wider population. This testing could consider, for instance, if such variables as age, gender, prior work, background education, and life experiences have any effect on the ways in which graduate students engage in transformative learning.

### **Parameters of the Study**

This study focused on what critical incidents led to transformative learning for graduate students, the ways in which these incidents were experienced, and what resulted from these incidents. I limited the study to a description of two critical incidents. The first was described as the most vivid incident that led to profound cognitive and affective change(s) for the graduate student. The second was described as a GINTOT, that is, an incident when the participants thought to themselves, or aloud, "Gee, I never thought of that." These two incidents could be the same incident, that is, cognitive and affective change(s) could have resulted from the GINTOT incident or they could be described as two separate incidents both resulting in change.

These limitations prevented an exploration of many other facets of transformative learning, such as, multiple critical events, the nature and sequence of the process, and other



integrating circumstances. This study did not include other important theories of learning, such as, the accumulation of technical and communicative knowledge. This study was also limited because it was a retrospective study and was reliant upon participants who were articulate, reflective, self-aware, and rational. It did not explore other conscious ways of learning, such as relational learning, or the influences on learning that result from social structures, action, and power. It also did not explore unconscious ways of knowing such as intuition, feelings, and whole person knowing. The study design recognized the important influence of individual factors on the microcontext of the participants, but it did not consider these in light of the recognized stages of adult development. Finally, this study was limited in scope because it did not speak to the macrocontext of the demographic, historic, geographic, economic, and/or political environments in which the participants were situated.

### **Glossary of Terms**

**Conscientization:** A theory of transformative learning associated with Paulo Friere (1970) that is consciousness-raising. It is a similar process to perspective transformation, however generally looked upon as a political act (Dirkx, 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

**Constructivism:** A term denoting philosophies of education that are person oriented and based on ways of gaining knowledge built upon by needs and interests of the individual. Learning for the individual occurs in a subjective way, through a process of making meaning of individual experiences and then changing understanding. (Cranton, 1994b, p. 9).



**Contextual Factors:** Those factors that influence the immediate learning event. These can include the personal, familial, educational, and professional background of the individual, especially at the time (microcontext). It also includes the more distant background (macrocontext involving the demographic, political, economic, environmental, and social history that has exerted an influence on the individual both while growing up and at the time of his/her graduate studies. It also includes a broader context of normal adult development such as phases and stages of life (Clark, 1991, 1992; Sveinunggaard, 1993 cited in Taylor, 1998).

**Critical Incidents:** Accounts of easily remembered events of major significance to a person because of the experience itself or the resulting learning outcome (Brookfield, 1980).

**Emancipatory Learning:** A learning process which is seen as liberating because it frees individuals from any forces (assumed or otherwise) that limits individual choice and/or exerts power over individual lives (Cranton, 1994).

**Individuation:** A learning process of coming to terms with one's inner self in such a way that leads to greater self-confidence and self-governance. It is outwardly manifested by a greater sense of empowerment usually contributed to by new talents and roles (Boyd, 1991 cited in Taylor, 1998).

**Meaning Perspective:** The cultural and psychological assumptions that filter each new experience. Also the structure by which each new experience is assimilated and changed by past experiences (Mezirow, 1985).

**Meaning Schemes:** The social laws that influence human behaviour (Cranton, 1994).



**Perspective Transformation:** A learning process that can occur through rational discussion with others that brings about a change in vantage point, whereby an individual is able to see beyond their own point of view. An individual becomes open to, understanding of, and accepting of other points of views and is able to include and integrate these into their own meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1991a).

**Positivism:** A term denoting philosophies of education that are subject oriented and based on the accumulation of instrumental and technical knowledge (Cranton, 1994).

**Transformative Learning:** An adult learning process requiring critical self-reflection that results in a recognition and revision of assumptions, premises, ways of interpreting experience, or perspectives on the world (Cranton, 1994b).

**Triggering Events:** An unexpected event that happens that can be viewed as either positive or negative but usually results in some degree of feeling inwardly discomforted and confused (Brookfield, 1987).

### **Organization of the Document**

This first chapter introduced the concept of transformative learning, discussed the background to the problem, and provided a statement of the problem situation. The purpose of the study was outlined and the questions to be answered were stated. A rationale for this study was given, as well as the theoretical framework outlining the components that play a role in transformative learning. The importance of this study and the parameters were addressed. A glossary of terms was presented to provide easy access to the relevant terminology and the understanding intended for this study.



In chapter 2, literature is reviewed under three main headings. The first is an overview of transformative learning within the context of adult education. The second provides the historic background of transformative learning theory, an overview, and the unresolved issues related to the theory. The third section provides a synopsis of the empirical studies reviewed.

In chapter 3, the methodology and procedures are set out. This begins with a description and rationale behind the research design, and a description of the research methodology and approach. The rationale is provided for the research instruments along with a description. Next, the selection of the participants is described and the participants are introduced. Procedures for this study are given. Considerable detail is given regarding data collection, recording, processing, and analysis. Methodological assumptions and limitations are presented followed by ethical considerations. Finally, there is a restatement of the problem for which this study had been undertaken and a summary of the chapter.

Chapter 4 considers the findings of this study. A narrative description is given of the graduate student participants including their educational background, personal data, present status of educational studies, and work experience. These findings are displayed on tables for easy retrieval in the appendix. An inductive analysis and interpretation of the findings is made under four main headings: (1) Who are the participants?; (2) What are the Critical Incidents?; (3) How were the Incidents Experienced?; and (4) What Resulted from the incidents? An interpretation of the findings is made as a summary of the chapter.

Finally, chapter 5 provides a synthesis of this study. Discussion is made of the most



important findings that relate to implications for practice, theory, and future research.

Conclusions and recommendations for facilitating the practice of transformative learning in graduate school are put forward. The chapter ends with personal final thoughts.



## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Organization of the Present Chapter

Literature was reviewed in three distinct and progressive phases for this study. First, a preliminary literature review involved background study of transformative learning and adult education to philosophies of education. These studies are linked to theories for teaching, instructional environments, learning outcomes, and the individual factors of adult learners as discussed in chapter 1. The second phase of the literature review involved an overview of the history and development of transformative learning theory through the primary works of Mezirow, Boyd, and Freire as cited in Taylor's critical review (1998). This phase also included a comprehensive critical review of the unresolved issues put forth in the theoretical and empirical literature collected and analyzed by Taylor up to 1988.

The third and final phase of the literature review involved a familiarization with Taylor's (1998) compilation of the 45 empirical studies of Mezirow's transformative learning theory up to 1998. From information gathered from Taylor's study, a further examination was made of 10 of these studies in particular. As well, an extensive word search of ERIC database (1980-2000) using the three separate words *transformative*, *learning*, and *theory* revealed a number of other relevant studies on transformative learning that did not meet the qualifications of Taylor's review but were considered in this study.



## **Transformative Learning and Adult Education**

Philosophies of education are sometimes thought of within the two broad concepts of positivism and constructivism. Cranton (1994b) describes these as follows:

Positivism is most easily understood by thinking of scientific or instrumental knowledge, that is knowledge of invariant laws and objective data derived empirically.... in the constructivist perspective knowledge is constructed by the individual who perceives the world, and there is no objective reality. (p. 9)

In the categories of philosophies of education used in the framework discussed in chapter 1, five major philosophies of education emerge (Elias & Merriam, 1980). These were liberal, behaviourist, progressive, humanistic, and radical. Liberal and behaviourist philosophies of education fit into the category of positivism because they have a subject orientation. The progressive, humanistic, and radical philosophies of education fit within the category of constructivism because they have a person orientation. Transformative learning is considered to be of a constructivist philosophy, person oriented, and emancipatory (Cranton, 1994b). It is constructivist because it builds upon the experiences and contextual factors of the learner. It is person oriented because it takes into account the needs, interests, and experiences of the learner. It is emancipatory because it is consciousness raising and liberating with an objective toward individual and social change. If one of the important goals of education is to provide the means for changing society and individuals (Apps, 1973; Lawson, 1979), then facilitating transformative learning ought to be a critical objective of adult education in general and graduate school in particular (Cranton, 1994b; Schmuck, 1988).



It is important to recognize in a study of this nature that not all learning is meant to be transformative and to understand how that, in practice, a mixture of these orientations could and often do occur (Cranton, 1994b). Categorizing education into various groups or orientations can be helpful in organizing information and piecing together a number of related ideas. However, it can also hinder tremendous benefits that may result from inter-relating various components of a variety of alternative philosophies of education.

### **Historical Background of Transformative Learning Theory**

The notion of transformative learning is primarily identified with the pioneering work of Jack Mezirow from a national US study he conducted in 1978. Mezirow's research involved women returning to school after a long period away from formal education. In this study, Mezirow identified a change in the women that forms the basis of his transformative learning theory. This can also be viewed as a perspective transformation. Mezirow describes a perspective transformation in the following way:

Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of our presuppositions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand and feel about our world; through a meaning reorganization reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive, discriminating and integrative perspective; and making decisions or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (p. 224)

Data for his study were collected through in depth interviews of 85 women from four major US cities and inductively analyzed. From this analysis, Mezirow (1995, p. 50) as cited in Taylor (1998, p. 8) also identified 10 phases of perspective transformation:



1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one's discontent and process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provisionally trying out new roles
9. Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's new perspective

These 10 phases of perspective transformation have been identified by others and thus verified. Other studies, however, have shown differences from the 10 phases (Taylor, 1998). Mezirow (1995) later recognized that the process does not always follow the same pattern.

Mezirow's (1991) work acknowledges input from various elements of psychology, sociology, and philosophy but it predominately is rooted in humanistic philosophy and critical social theory. In 1981, 3 years after his study of women returning to college, Mezirow presented a critical theory of adult learning and education. He built on the work of Habermas (1971), a communicative theorist, who identified three domains of learning: the technical (empirical knowledge governed by technical rules), the practical (social norms), and the emancipatory (self-knowledge and self-reflection, cited in Cranton, 1994b. p. 24). In



1985, Mezirow (1985a) drew further on Habermas' (1971) work and related the process of self-directed learning to perspective transformation, which led to a critical theory of self-directed learning (Mezirow, 1985b). During this period, he defined meaning perspectives, meaning schemes, and psychological assumptions and discussed the different types of distortions that can cloud meaning perspectives.

Mezirow's (1991a) meaning schemes are the subunits of meaning perspectives and include "specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgements, and feeling that constitute interpretations of experience" (pp. 5-6). Mezirow's (1990) meaning perspective involve "a collection of meaning schemes made up of higher-order schemata and evaluations" (p. 2). They comprise the particular frame of reference from which to view both the world and one's self. Meaning perspectives have two dimensions which according to Mezirow (1997) are made up of *habits of mind and point of view*. These two components are the habitual way in which things are done (which are highly influenced by an individual's context) and the way in which the habits of mind are expressed. Mezirow (1991) introduced transformative learning "as an explanation for change in meaning structures that evolves in two domains of learning based on the epistemology of Habermas' communicative theory" (cited in Taylor, 1998, p. 5). The first, instrumental learning, is related to Habermas' technical knowledge, which is seen as being based on positivism. The second, communicative learning is related to Habermas' practical knowledge, which is seen as being based on constructivism. Taylor suggests that Mezirow offers a theory of learning "that is uniquely adult, abstract, idealized and grounded in the nature of human communication" (p. 5).



Mezirow (1995) also includes three common themes in his theory of transformative learning: (1) the centrality of experience, (2) critical reflection, and (3) rational discourse. These themes are emphasized as being both necessary and central to learning. The learner's experience is the starting point from which critical reflection and rational discourse can occur (Tennant, 1991). Critical reflection occurs as a result of questioning one's assumptions and beliefs. This can involve questions involving instrumental learning through a *critical reflection of assumptions* (such as focusing on critiquing a text) but also can involve a deeper subjective reframing of self through a *critical self-reflection of assumptions* (such as focusing on one's cultural limitations); (Mezirow, 1998). Taylor (1998) suggests that transformative learning consists primarily of the process of a critical reflection of assumptions, such as "habits of mind based on logical, ethical, ideological, social, economic, political, ecological, or spiritual aspects of experience" (p. 9).

### **Overview of Transformative Learning Theory**

Transformative learning theory is viewed as being based on constructivist assumptions, which Mezirow (1991) describes as including:

A conviction that meaning exists within ourselves rather than in external forms such as books and that personal meanings that we attribute to our experience are acquired and validated through human interaction and communication. (p. xiv)

Meaning perspectives are important components of transformative learning because they are the filter for experiences (Taylor, 1998) that allows individuals to reflect on their "presuppositions of prior learning" (Cranton, 1994b, p. 27). Three types of meaning perspectives are described by Mezirow (1991, pp. 28-29).



Epistemic are those relating to knowledge or how we use knowledge. Sociolinguistic are related to social and cultural norms, expectations, and language. Psychological are relating to the way individuals see themselves as individuals. This study primarily explored the epistemic and psychological meaning perspectives with the methodology of data collection used because they focus more on the individual. However, this was not intended to undermine the importance of the sociolinguistic perspective.

Two other alternative perspectives of transformative learning stand out in the literature with Mezirow's work. These are the works of Robert Boyd, who offers a model of transformative learning based on analytical psychology, and Paulo Friere, who offers an emancipatory model of transformation.

Boyd (1991) looks at transformation from the perspective of an individual's inner journey with the purpose of freeing an individual from the unconscious content and cultural norms that can inhibit growth. He bases his work in the analytical psychology work of Carl Jung. Boyd (1991) sees individuation as involving "the discovery of new talents, a sense of empowerment and confidence, a deeper understanding of one's inner self, and greater sense of self-responsibility" (cited in Taylor, 1998, p. 13). Whereas Mezirow's theory sees the individual as becoming more autonomous, Boyd sees the individual transformation as helping an individual to become more socially aware and sensitive. Taylor (1998) describes this development as "a greater interdependent relationship with and compassion for society" (p. 14).



A number of studies on transformative learning lend credibility to this concept. Courtenay, Merriam, and Reeves (1998) argue in their study of how terminally ill patients made meaning of their experience that “this sense involves making a contribution, a heightened sensitivity to life and people, and being of service” (p. 78). First and Way (1995) described the participants in their study on parenting as having increased in empathy to others and as having a worldview that shifted “from reactive to proactive, unempowered to empowered” (p. 106). Laswell’s (1994) study of adult learning after job loss, which explored the transformational potential, suggested “a new connectedness with others” as one of the learner outcomes (p. 233). Finally, the findings from Scott (1991) of leaders in social action revealed the development beyond the self as an important theme to the participants’ transformative learning:

The last theme that emerged in the nature of change was a sense that involvement in the process produced a need for the self to reach beyond itself. The individual ego became less important while “the importance of serving the community became more important than one’s own individual ego.” (p. 266)

Boyd’s view of transformative learning stresses an individual transformation whereby an individual comes to terms with the experiences in their life internally, is able to make sense of them, and can then move on to extend beyond self to be more incorporating and empathetic with others.

Boyd also recognizes a process of transformative learning that is different from Mezirow’s (1991) theory. Mezirow describes a process that is linear and sequential whereas Boyd’s process is described more as being spiral and having a back-and-forth movement.



Boyd identifies three distinct activities: receptivity, recognition, and grieving (cited in Taylor, 1998, p. 15). Boyd and Myers (1988) and Scott (1997) put forth grieving as the critical condition to transformative learning. To facilitate this process, Boyd and Myers (1988) encourage adult educators to act as mentors giving seasoned guidance and compassionate criticisms.

A third perspective of transformative learning from the work of Paulo Friere is the notion of emancipatory learning. The major difference here is in the social outcome of the transformation as opposed to Mezirow's emphasis on individual transformation. Friere (1970) coined the phrase *conscientization* to refer to his theory of transformative learning. He first developed his theory of education through work with literacy education of the poor but his ideas have since spread throughout the world. Dirkx (1998) provides an excellent description of Friere's theory of transformation as consciousness-raising:

Freire argues that education, through praxis, should foster freedom among the learners by enabling them to reflect on their world and, thereby, change it. For Friere, transformative learning is emancipatory and liberating at both a personal and social level. It provides us with a voice, with the ability to name the world and, in so doing, construct for ourselves the meaning of the world. (p. 3)

Friere's transformation occurs as a result of the individual becoming aware of external influences that inhibit freedom and equality. For Friere, education is the means by which an individual becomes empowered to act against oppression. Friere sees education's purpose as going beyond personal experience to the social realm where individual transformation leads



to social transformation. In Friere's theory, an individual either integrates what they learn into society or simply adapts; it cannot be "neutral" (Taylor, 1998, p. 16).

Mezirow's transformative learning theory sits in the middle ground between Boyd's individuation theory and Friere's emancipatory transformation. These three different perspectives of transformative learning are useful to keep in mind, particularly when considering the unresolved issues of transformative learning.

### **Unresolved Issues related to Transformative Learning Theory**

A number of unresolved issues can be seen in the literature that relates to transformative learning theory. Unresolved, however, does not mean that the issues go unanswered. This section looks briefly at these issues and offers some of the responses to the critiques put forth in the literature. Taylor (1998) offers the most comprehensive review of seven unresolved issues that this study will also discuss:

- ◆ individual change versus social action,
- ◆ decontextualized view of learning,
- ◆ universal mode of adult learning,
- ◆ adult development: shift or progression,
- ◆ an emphasis on rationality,
- ◆ other ways of knowing, and
- ◆ perspective transformation: the model (pp. 27- 45).

Taylor emphasizes that most of the critiques of Mezirow's work have to do with



theoretical issues relating specifically to “underlying constructs about learning” (p. 21) and not with empirical studies, as these have been largely unpublished in the past. Taylor suggests an exploration of both forms of inquiry for future research in order to understand the nature of transformative learning.

Other reviews of critical responses also exist that correspond with this list. Cranton (1994) describes five unresolved areas: social change, power, context, rationality and practice. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) consider four unresolved issues: context, rationality, social action, and educator’s role.

The first of Taylor’s issues revolves around the difference between individual and social change. This is a controversial area in the literature and is found in a number of criticisms of Mezirow’s work (e.g., Collard & Law, 1989; Cunningham, 1992; Griffin, 1987; Hart, 1990; Newman, 1993, 1994). Mezirow is criticized for making connections between his work and the works of Habermas and Friere, while at the same time presenting a theory that emphasizes the transformation of the individual without addressing the issues of context, group relations, social structures, action, and power. Mezirow (1989) answers his critics simply by stating that transformation must first begin with the individual learner before social transformation can occur. He does not discredit the importance of social transformation but believes that is an issue of personal choice for the learner. Mezirow also does not believe that transformative learning necessitates a group context in order to occur, although he also does not deny the benefits that a group context can have on individual transformation.



The second unresolved issue relates to a decontextualized view of adult learning whereby transformative learning is seen as being studied outside of the historic and sociocultural environment of the individual. This criticism is largely put forward by the work of Clark and Wilson (1991) regarding Mezirow's study of women returning to school after a long period of time. The criticism is that Mezirow does not identify or speak to any contextual factors that may be involved in his study. These criticisms are answered in the affirmative by Mezirow (1991b). He recognizes, in his response, that context is a vital component to transformative learning but suggests that critics have mistaken his description of ideal conditions to mean the actual conditions of practice. He describes this style of learning as an utopian style of learning with ideal conditions for discourse. Mezirow had to clarify his position concerning the importance of context because of the confusion that resulted. A study by Neuman (1996) suggests similar findings to Mezirow's view of context. Neuman states that participants can "transcend their immediate and past context and its influence by challenging cultural norms, taking risks, and integrating critical types of reflection into their work and personhood" (p. 472 cited in Taylor, 1998, p. 27). The importance of context however, remained a strong issue of debate and included other works by Clark (1991, 1992) and Sveinunggaard (1993). Subsequently, a great number of studies looked at context and transformative learning and have supported Clark and Wilson's original criticisms. Taylor (1998) draws attention to the importance of recognizing and understanding contextual factors of individuals to transformative learning in his critical review. He cites a number of studies that acknowledge a variety of individual contextual factors that stood out in studies of transformative learning experiences (cited on p. 27):



- ◆ readiness for change (Bailey, 1996; Hunter, 1980; Pierce, 1986; Van Nostrand, 1992);
- ◆ the role of experience (Coffman, 1989);
- ◆ prior stressful life event (Vogelsang, 1993); and
- ◆ a predisposition for a transformative experience (Taylor, 1994; Turner, 1986)

The third unresolved issue has to do with Mezirow's idea of developing a universal theory for adult learning. Mezirow's views are "autonomous and self-directed in nature, have an individual orientation and depend on the individual being free to determine his or her own reality" (Taylor, 1998, p. 29). Mezirow (1991a, 1991b) is criticized for his beliefs that transformative learning should be practiced by all cultures, despite a clear cultural contradiction that exists for some cultures to allow the conditions necessary for transformative learning, such as "the essentiality that the individual must be free to determine his/her own reality" (Taylor, 1998, p. 29). Mezirow argues for a worldview that "critical reflection and rational discourse have proven themselves in more circumstances to work better at understanding the underlying assumptions of human communication" (Mezirow, 1998, as cited in Taylor, 1998, p. 30). The literature surrounding this issue indicates a greater need for further studies to be conducted that examine cultural differences (Gallagher, 1997; Taylor, 1993).

Another unresolved issue has to do with Mezirow's failure to distinguish between what would be considered normal adult development or stages of life (progression) and the type of perspective transformation (shift) that occurs in transformative learning (Tennant, 1993). Speaking about Mezirow's work, Tennant (1993) says, "he needs to distinguish



learning experiences and personal changes which are fundamentally transformative and emancipatory from those which are simply part of the social expectations associated with the different phases of life” (p. 39 as cited in Taylor, 1998, p. 32). There does not seem to be much basis for an argument between Tennant and Mezirow, other than the difference of interpretation of the words *shift* and *progression*. Mezirow (1994) sees adults as going through developmental progress through shifts, and he recognizes two ways in which this can occur; through a major event (disorientating dilemma) or through an incremental path that takes place slowly over time. Tennant (1993) describes similar changes in adulthood as developmental progress. It would appear, however, that Mezirow’s changes could be viewed within the context of Tennant’s normal life cycle, whereas, Tennant’s changes in adulthood, do not necessarily involve the transformational change that Mezirow is suggesting in his theory.

Mezirow (1990) is also criticized for what is perceived as an overly Western emphasis on rationality because he identifies content, process, and premise as the three forms of reflection in transformative learning. Taylor (1998) points out that Mezirow’s assumptions about rationality are well-supported in empirical studies. He suggests, however, that “other factors such as, the role of emotions, other ways of knowing, and unconscious learning, are of equal importance in a perspective transformation” (p. 34). These criticisms are legitimate and provide many additional avenues of study that could contribute to the present understanding of the transformative learning phenomenon. For instance, many studies have already considered the role of emotions. This affective dimension of knowledge suggests that emotions play an important role in transformative learning (Clark, 1991;



Coffman, 1989; Gehrels, 1984; Morgan, 1987; Neuman, 1996; Scott, 1991; Sveinunggaard, 1993; as cited in Taylor, 1998).

Other ways of knowing besides emotions and rationality have also been identified in studies that can have an effect on a perspective transformation. Some of these other ways of knowing are cited in Taylor (1998, p. 36) to include: intuition (Bailey, 1996; Brooks, 1989), extrarational knowing (Vogelsang, 1993), the guiding force of feelings (Hunter, 1980; Taylor, 1994), and whole person knowing (The Group for Collaborative Inquiry, 1994). Taylor also suggests the importance of relational knowing and unconscious learning. All of these other ways of knowing could suggest a reevaluation of traditional learning outcomes, as well as a deeper understanding of individual factors and the instructional environment.

The final unresolved issue is largely related to empirical studies in the literature and has to do with the model of perspective transformation. Originally, Mezirow's (1978) pioneering work with women returning to college indicated a linear process in the 10 phases or steps of transformative learning, a process which has been confirmed by a number of studies (e.g., Dewane, 1993; Hunter, 1980; Lytle, 1989; Morgan, 1987; Surina-Egan, 1985; Williams, 1985 as cited in Taylor, 1998). Subsequently, however, other studies identified a deviation from this linear process and suggested more of a spiral process that was evolutionary (Coffman, 1989, 1991; Elias, 1993; Holt, 1994; Laswell, 1994; Neuman, 1996; Saavedra, 1995; Taylor, 1995; as cited in Taylor, 1998). Some researchers also argue that the process can span many years (Pope, 1996) and does not necessarily have to follow all of the steps that Mezirow has identified, as Morgan's (1987) study of displaced homemakers suggests.



The next problem area within the literature has to do with what Mezirow describes as a *disorientating dilemma*, the catalyst or the trigger for change. Clark (1991, 1993), Pope (1996), and Courtenay et al. (1996, 1998) all found this aspect to be more of an unfolding of *integrating circumstances*. These circumstances are described by Clark (1993) as “indefinite periods in which the persons [*sic*] consciously or unconsciously searches for something which is missing in their life; when they find this missing piece, the transformation process is catalyzed” (pp. 117- 118). This alternative view of Mezirow’s *disorientating dilemma* as a catalyst for change was later recognized and described by Mezirow (1994) as an *incremental path* which involves a “revision of meaning schemes, cumulatively over time” (as cited in Taylor, 1998, p. 32).

The final area of question in the model has to do with discrepancies concerning outcome measures. How do people know if they have been transformed? Who decides this? Moreover, what are the results of transformational learning? Mezirow’s (1991a) definition of perspective transformation follows a definite path, which includes first awareness, then change, and finally action. Mezirow’s path of perspective transformation is seen as “dependent of the logical-rational side, again discounting other ways of knowing” (Taylor, 1998, p. 43). This process is also seen to be accompanied by “greater self-confidence in new roles and relationships” (Taylor, 1998, p. 42).

Clark (1991) identifies a similar process: first, a psychological change in the way individuals view themselves; second, a convictional change of their belief systems; and finally, a behavioural change evident in their lifestyles. Clark’s process of perspective



transformation is broader than Mezirow and includes more of a “social dimension to change” rather than an “individual psychological phenomenon” (Taylor, 1998, p. 44).

Other questions that arise concerning the nature of transformative learning (outcomes) changes have to do with the duration of the change; whether the change is something that is static and sustained or in itself, evolving; and whether the change is reversible. These questions seem to suggest that the nature of individual transformative learning experiences is very idiosyncratic. Taylor (1998) suggests that further empirical studies are warranted that would include, for example, the participant’s original perspective prior to the transformative learning experience, as well as an increase in supporting data to objectively validate learning outcomes (perspective changes). Taylor (1998) presents a number of outcomes that have been identified through empirical studies, which are listed here in summary form.

- ◆ increase in personal power
- ◆ spirituality
- ◆ compassion for others
- ◆ creativity
- ◆ a shift in discourse
- ◆ courage
- ◆ a sense of liberation
- ◆ a new connectedness with others

What becomes apparent in reading the critiques is the importance of identifying the frame of reference of the research that has been carried out. Taylor (1998) suggests that



much of the criticism of Mezirow's work have to do with his connection of transformative learning theory with Habermas' communication theory. Taylor points out, however, that "the difference between the critiques and Mezirow's interpretation of transformative learning theory is due in large part to the various authors' differing views of self and its locus of control in the universe" (p. 45).

The review of unresolved issues concerning transformative learning identified a number of ideas that were pulled together for this study. The main ideas were conceptualized into a model of transformative learning where the focus was upon graduate students in a university setting. The resulting model (see Figure 2) situated the individual participants within a context made up of their own individual, familial, cultural, socio/political environments. These microcontextual factors were also recognized as being situated within a larger macrocontext involving demographic, historic, economic, socio/political environments. The model was seen as situated within the developmental stages of what is considered normal adult life cycles, however, the adult life cycle is not considered outside the macro- and micro-contextual factors but embodied within the social relations of these factors. The process of transformative learning is considered to take place within life cycles of normal adult development, however, a further understanding of adult development was not considered.

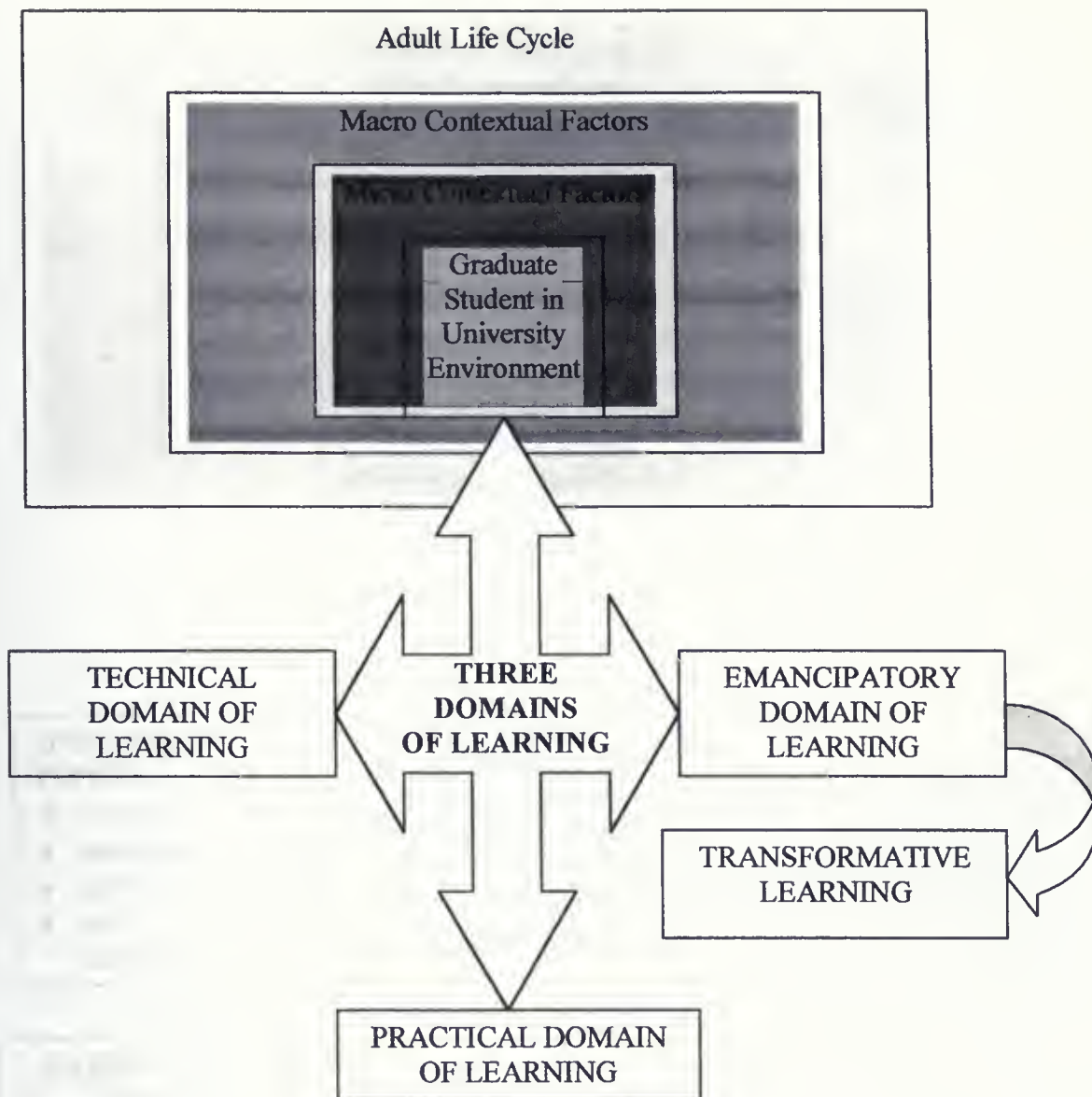
The review of this literature also informed my identification of the frame of reference used for the model, as this would reveal different starting points and different learning outcomes. In this regard, the study was approached strictly from the frame of reference of the graduate students who participated. The transformative learning model from



this perspective was also recognized as being situated within the emancipatory domain of knowledge and as such, it was only one, of several different types of learning that adults could have experienced (see Figure 2). Other types of learning could include technical and practical domains of knowledge (Cranton, 1994; Habermas, 1970; Mezirow, 1991).

The model is based on the input of ways of knowing from a rational, self-identified transformative learner who is both articulate and self-reflective (see Figure 3). Other inputs were recognized but were not the focus for this study. These included but were not limited to, intuition, unconscious knowing, irrational knowing, and relational knowing. The literature review also helped to conceptualize the outputs of this model for transformative learning as outcomes from perspective transformations. These outcomes were identified in the literature as being cognitive, affective, and psychological in nature. However, my model was concerned only with the cognitive and affective changes as output measures. Again, the output measures were solely based on the self-identified description of the graduate students but included outcomes that were of an individual and social nature. The literature described several processes, both linear and spiral, and different phases of the processes, however, no specific process was attached to this model so that the data would speak for themselves. Instead of trying to identify a particular process, critical incidents were looked at as vivid snapshots within the process itself. It was hoped that the conceptualization of this model from the review of unresolved issues in the literature would facilitate an integration of ideas that could allow for a “congruent understanding of transformative learning theory” (Taylor, 1998, p. 45).





**Figure 2.**

Model within individual life and learning context.



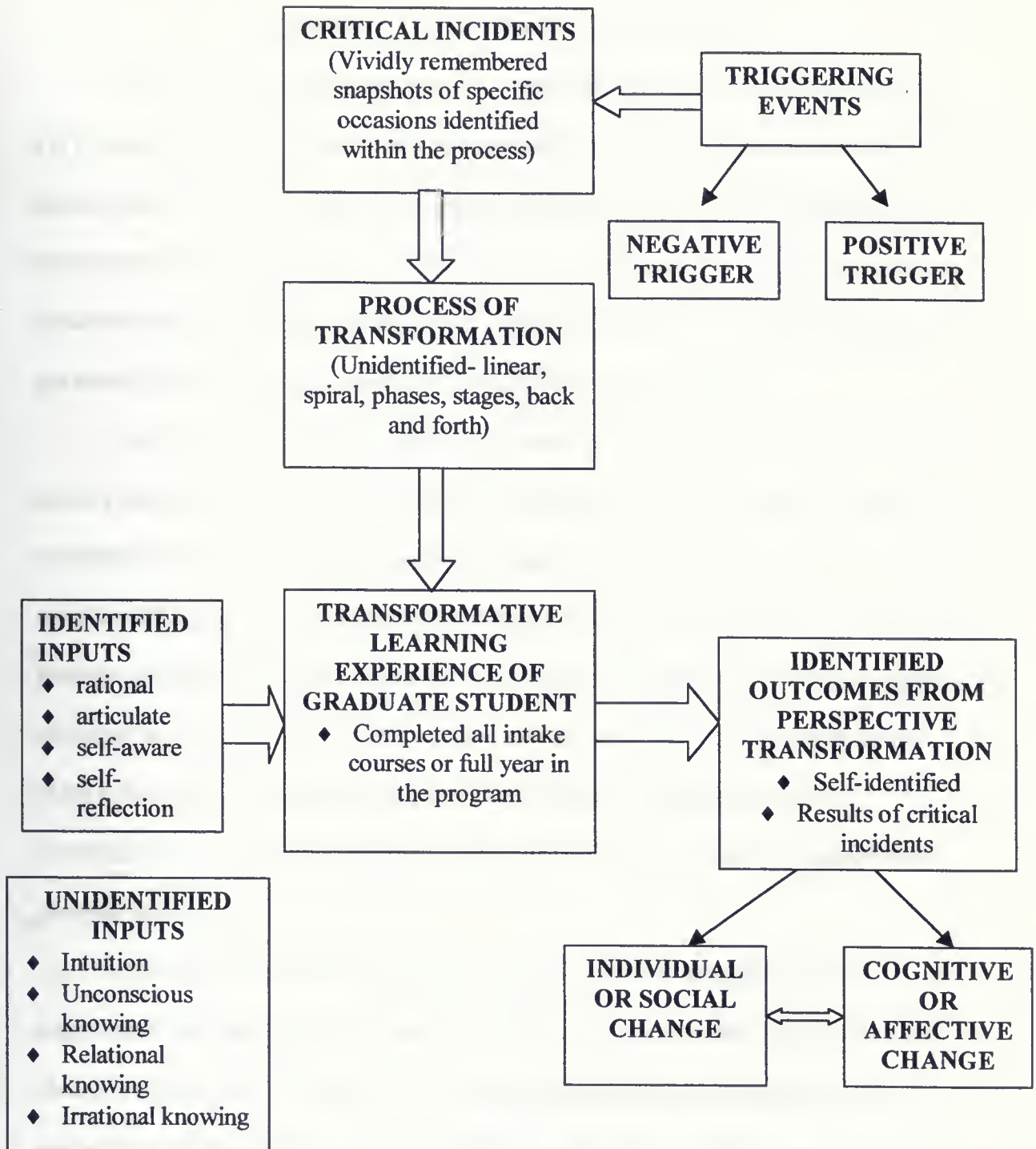


Figure 3.

Transformative learning conceptual model.



### **Empirical Studies of Transformative Learning**

Thirty-five empirical studies were reviewed which fell under two main categories:

(1) 15 studies explored the experience of transformative learning from the perspective of the learner and (2) 25 studies explored the fostering of transformative learning pedagogy; most of these were from the perspective of the instructor. A great majority of the empirical studies conducted on transformative learning remain as unpublished master's or doctoral theses and are therefore difficult to access and expensive to obtain when possible.

Many studies which focus on the transformative learning experience of individuals, explore particular experiences or settings that led to transformative learning in an attempt to understand ways in which adults learn and change within a given context. Laswell (1994) considered the potential of transformative learning in adults in the aftermath of job loss. The findings revealed "incidental learning and new meaning perspectives as central components of the job loss experience" (p. 229). A similar type of study was conducted by Karpiak (1991) of professionals (social workers) at midlife stages. This study considers developmental stages, context, and the triggering events that precipitated change for this group of individuals.

Clark (1992) studied the experiences of nine adults self-identified with transformational learning "in order to access the role of context in the learning process." The results reveal that the "context was directive and determinative of the learning in every case studied" (p. 31). In another study, Clark (1993) looked specifically at the triggering events that initiated the transformational learning experience. The focus was on "the initiating events and the way in which they were experienced by the participants." (p. 79). This



approach facilitated an understanding of how these events “functioned in the learning process” (p.79). Two initiating events were identified as a disorientating dilemma and integrating circumstances. Clark discusses how these two events differ from one another. The integrating circumstance “is not a sudden, life-threatening rupture but rather as an opportunity for exploration and development.”; “It invites rather than threatens” (p. 82). Also it “helps to clarify past experience rather than triggering a reevaluation of those experiences...and rather than demanding action....seems to lure the person in, drawing him or her to greater depths of understanding and personal growth” (p. 82).

Courtenay, Merriam, and Reeves (1996) conducted a study to understand how HIV positive adults make meaning out of their lives. They reasoned that the trigger would be a life-threatening illness. The process of meaning-making which is so central to transformative learning, they reasoned, “would assume a particular urgency if the diagnosis meant that one’s life might end at an unnaturally early age” (p. 73). The results of this study identified first, a period of initial reaction, second, a catalytic experience that sets in motion the meaning-making process, and third, three distinct, yet interrelated phases of reflection and activity (p. 77). An interesting observation, given the nature of the illness involved, was that “the initial reaction period lasted from six months to five years and was characterized by cognitive, affective and behaviour changes” (p.77).

First and Way (1995) considered transformative learning as one unanticipated learning outcome of their study on parent education. Self-control, critical thinking, empathy, empowerment, and improved communication were among the cited results of the transformative learning outcome of the parents. Narushima (1999) considered



transformative learning within the field of critical gerontology. The results of this study of elderly volunteers suggest that transformative learning “can not only promote individual autonomy and independence, it can also build independence and connections, empowering adults to take collective action in their own communities to reform social practice... it holds the promise of broadening the possible outcomes of aging” (p. 4). Another social issue was examined in William’s (1986) study of the theory of perspective transformation applied to the problem of male spouse abuse. The findings suggest that “subjects with higher change in perspective transformation will also change the most toward less use of physically abusive behaviour” (p. 324). These studies were all suggestive of the benefits of transformative learning outcomes for adults confronting social issues. It also raises the question of whether these benefits would apply to a variety of social problems and settings.

A number of studies were conducted to raise cultural, racial, and social awareness. Barlas (1997) examined the development of white consciousness through the transformative learning process. This study recommends more research on how to implement and apply transformative learning theories and “more discourse on... its processes so that social change can be facilitated within our educational institutions” (p. 24). Brooks and Edwards (1997) examined women’s sexual identity development in order to understand the “integration of the individual with the socio-historic context” of transformative learning and to understand the “relationship between the individual and social change”(p. 37). Ziegahn (1998) used on-line reflection to transform intercultural perspectives within a university program. The Group for Collaborative Inquiry (1994) developed a model for transformative learning with regard to individual development and social action. Transformative learning



and leadership was studied by Scott (1991) to show “a relationship between what happens in the public arena with what occurred in the personal psyche” (p. 260). Cognitive rational changes were identified in this study, as well as socio-emotional beliefs about the leader’s experiences.

The second category of empirical studies reviewed are mentioned here briefly as they did not directly contribute to the focus of this study. However, they were deemed related to the “so what?” question driving the importance of this study. A number of studies focused on the restructuring of learning institutions to facilitate not only the practice of transformative learning for individual learners, but the need for transformative learning to take place for the institution itself (e.g., Cranton, 1998; Imel, 1999; Issacson, 1992; McClenney, 1994; Schmuck, 1998; Spence, 1980; Stanage, 1989). Other transformative learning studies focused more on the role of administrators and instructors in facilitating the actual practice of transformative learning. (e.g., Anderson & Saavedra, 1995; Boyd & Fares, 1983; Cassara, 1991; Cavanagh, 1997; Common, 1994; Dirkx, 1998; Duncan, 1997; Schmuck, 1998; Sokol & Cranton, 1998; Taylor, 1997).

### Summary

This chapter considered the existing literature on transformative learning in three ways. First, the theory was considered in light of adult education, its history and development, and the works of three major researchers: Mezirow, Boyd, and Friere. Second, criticisms of transformative theory were examined to understand the basis for unresolved issues and to develop a conceptual model for this study. Finally, empirical studies were reviewed concerning the experience of transformative learning and the practice of it in



educational institutions. Studies, considered in the third section, all indicate a growing interest and applicability of transformative learning theory. The research demonstrates an interrelationship between studies with implications for how transformative learning can inform instructors, institutional administrators, students, staff development, and institutional change.



## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES**

### **Overview**

The goal of this study was first to situate the conceptual model within the individual life and learning context (see Figure 2) of the graduate student. This developed from the literature review as a means to locate the critical incidents described by participants within a broader context of other individual factors of life that may also influence graduate students in transformative learning. A phenomenological approach was taken (Husserl, 1962; Patton, 1990; Schutz, 1977), using the perspective of the graduate student as the frame of reference.

The transformative learning conceptual model (see Figure 3) then set out to situate the critical incidents, triggering events, and learning outcomes within the transformative learning experience of the graduate student. It was hoped that a more holistic understanding of the transformative learning experience would result.

This chapter describes the research design, the research methodology, and the approach taken. The research instrumentation is presented as well as the design of the questions. Details are given of the pilot study carried out, the selection of participants, and procedures used. The process of data collecting and recording are given, as well as the method of data processing and analysis that were used. Methodological assumptions and limitations provide the boundaries under which this study was undertaken, and the ethical considerations that were followed. A restatement of the problem is made, and finally, the chapter is summarized.



## Research Design

The overall design was qualitative and included participants' verbatim accounts about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts concerning their own transformative learning phenomenon. A phenomenological perspective was used because phenomenology "focuses on how people interpret their experiences" and "uses qualitative methods to gain deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of everyday experiences" (First & Way, 1995, p. 104).

Several studies were considered in the design of this research. King's (1996) study on perspective transformation in higher education provided the impetus for many decisions that had to be made. King argues that "the focus of the study had to be sharper regarding age and educational experience of the participants" (p. 1). With this in mind, I chose to limit my study to adult graduate students within the field of education. I purposely chose the use of critical incidents to focus on "the specific perspective transformation to be studied" (King, 1996, p. 1). King also had to change the focus of her research from "identify" to "examine," since the factors she originally wanted to identify had already been noted in the literature. She had to subsequently make modifications to her research question. With this in mind, I chose to use the term "exploring" in my thesis title, so as not to limit myself to only identifying new events or examining old events previously identified in the literature. King also recommended changes in the research instrument to include "language that would best communicate the research concern to the participants" (p. 5). Among her suggestions was the use of "non-educated jargon for the participants" (p. 5). Some of my questions were purposely written with these suggestions in mind. For example, "Identify the most vivid



incident when you had a “GINTOT.” This is the incident when you thought to yourself, or out loud, ‘Gee, I never thought of that’.”

Ziegahn’s (1998) study of transformative learning of graduate students showed the value of conducting a study of transformative learning on-line. This prompted me to include two participants’ involvement on-line, who otherwise would not have been able to contribute to this study because of distance.

Narushima’s (1999) study on transformative learning theory in older volunteers had a significant impact on the background to the problem. I was struck by her question, “Why is it important to shed light on volunteerism among older adults today in Canada and other industrialized nations?” (p. 1). Narushima provides reasons by citing demographic, political, and economic trends, as well as changes in social and labour structures. This caused me to ask the question, “Why is it important to shed light on the events that engage graduate students in transformative learning”? Wanting to know the answer to this question, I included in the interview a number of questions that provided data concerning how transformative learning can be facilitated in a graduate program.

Having examined a number of research approaches used to explore transformative learning, I agreed with Boyd and Fales (1983) that “there is value in exploring such a phenomenon first among those who experience it and who find it subjectively useful and exciting” (p. 101). With this in mind, I sought to include participants who were eager to discuss their transformative learning experience.



### **Description of Research Methodology and Approach**

This study was approached from a qualitative, constructivist perspective. It relied on a critical and interpretive approach to empirical data of the transformative learning phenomenon of nine graduate students. The original focus of the study was abandoned once the data were collected and I became immersed in my findings. This resulted in a spiral research path that was both frustrating and at the same time challenging (Neuman, 1997). Inductive analysis allowed theory to be built from the data by making comparisons. New questions emerged and attention was given to social context, the passage of time, and sequence of events, in order to give meaning and translation of the participants' experiences and to build the interpretative narratives.

### **Instrumentation (Description)**

Data collection consisted of qualitative, open-ended questions that involved participants in a process of critical reflection. Participants were asked to describe and analyze critical incidents in their learning where their meaning perspectives changed in some way. As well, they were asked to identify the triggering events to these incidents and discuss whether they viewed these triggers as negative or positive. In order to understand the context of the lives of the participants, questions were also asked concerning the participants' background and what they brought with them into the program.

Participants were limited to full- or part-time graduate students who had completed at least 1 full year of their studies and all of their required intake courses. This criterion was given to ensure sufficient time in the program for critical reflection. The first data collection strategy was a critical incident questionnaire adapted from the initial design by Flanagan



(1954) and further described by Brookfield (1990). The definition of the critical incident is the one used by Brookfield (1990):

The critical incident technique prompts respondents to identify an incident, which can also be thought of as an event, that for some reason was of particular significance to them. (p. 97)

### Critical Incidents

The critical incident technique has been utilized by many researchers and practitioners in a variety of ways including, education, health, business and industry (Oaklief, 1976) with the primary objective of improving the effectiveness of a specific operation. Its principal advantage is “that it generates data based on actual behaviour rather than on a particular researcher’s subjectivity (Stano, 1983). It is described by Flanagan (1954) as follows:

The critical incident technique, rather than collecting opinions, hunches, and estimates, obtains a record of specific behaviours from those in the best position to make the necessary observations and evaluations. (p. 355)

The technique is particularly well suited for use with adults because of its practical nature. It “actively involves participants by capitalizing upon their experience, thereby making possible the application of new insights and behaviours to a relevant practice setting and ensuring relevance to the learner’s situation” (Lagravie & Beatty, 1985, p. 1).

The critical incident technique has been used in several ways applicable to graduate students. Some of these include: to study the reasons for success and failure of university students (Schmelzer, 1987); as an instructional method to involve participants in the



classroom (Lagravie & Beatty, 1985); and to identify administrative behaviour that could lead to greater accomplishment of the adult-continuing education and community service responsibilities (Oaklief, 1976).

A review of the literature shows consistency and detail as to the procedure for implementing the critical incident technique. Woolsey (1986) describes it in brief in the following way:

The critical incident technique is an exploratory qualitative method of research, which generates a comprehensive and detailed description of a content domain. It consists of asking eyewitness observers for factual accounts of behaviours-- incidents, which significantly contribute to a specified outcome--are critical. (p. 242)

Important components for applying the technique involve selecting a specific group and frame of reference to describe results, selecting a specific behaviour, and selecting a specific outcome to be measured (Kohl, 1972).

Potential outcomes of critical incidents can vary and may include validation of prior learning and background experiences (Cranton, 1994b), triggering events (Brookfield, 1987), cognitive and affective awareness and development (Brookfield, 1990), and changes in meaning perspectives (Cranton, 1994; Habermas, 1971; Mezirow, 1991). These potential outcomes or consequences of critical incidents formed the critical incident questions for this study.

### Triggering Events

Triggering events can be significant critical incidents in and of themselves, or they can simply be the impetus or spark for starting a critical incident or a learning process. Not



all critical incidents are associated with a triggering event. A triggering event is described by Brookfield (1987) as “some unexpected happening; an AHA!, or a surprise, which produces inner discomfort or perplexity” (p. 24). It is identified as the first of five stages that Brookfield categorizes in developing critical thinking. The emphasis in the literature thus far has been on negative triggering events (Apps, 1985; Boyd, & Fales, 1983; Brookfield, 1987; Hopson & Adams, 1977; Mezirow, 1977) such as the death of a spouse, divorce, illness and loss of job. Some researchers have also identified positive triggers to critical thinking (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Musgrove, 1977). Examples of positive triggering events are: stimulation from an adult educator, readings, discussion, environmental factors, and internal processes (Cranton, 1994b).

### **Design of the Questionnaire and Interview Questions**

Initially, I developed a questionnaire with four questions as well as four questions intended for the interview. However, following a pilot test with one individual, it was found that these questions did not allow for the desired level of inquiry. A framework for questioning from Mitchell and Coltrinari (in press) was used in a closer examination of the eight questions. This framework revealed that the eight questions were of a descriptive and analytical nature, therefore they were combined to form the final critical incident questionnaire (see Appendix A). The interview portion of this study followed a constructivist approach to explore in further detail the participants’ responses to the four descriptive and four analytical questions in the critical incident questionnaire (see Appendix B). Their responses suggested “fruitful areas for more focused exploration” as “the critical



incident paragraphs provide us with hunches as to what are the most significant concerns and assumptions of respondents” (Brookfield, 1987, p. 99.).

Deeper probing questions (see Appendix B) in the interviews were in the form of metacognitive, reconstructive, and evaluative questions (Mitchell & Coltrinari, in press). These questions were designed to explore the relationship of the events that engaged graduate students in transformative learning to individual contextual factors, instructional environments, and learning outcomes. First, three metacognitive questions were asked. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) state that metacognition “is often viewed as the highest level of mental activity and is especially needed for complex problem solving” (p. 206). The first three questions therefore, were designed to try to understand how the participants “think about thinking,” to make themselves “consciously aware” of their thinking, and to “monitor and control” their own mental process (Bruer, 1993, as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 206). In order to understand the individual contextual factors, the first two questions asked participants about their personal philosophy of education and theories for teaching (beliefs about teaching, learning, and student-teacher relationships). They also had to identify the origin of their beliefs. The third question delves into an understanding of the participants’ self-identified transformational change, where participants were asked to describe both cognitive and affective changes. The next three questions were evaluative questions whereby the participants were asked to appraise their past, present, and future learning experiences. The first of these questions requested that participants make comparisons of their graduate experience to other previous experiences and that of other students in the graduate program. The next question asked how participants could make



their learning more meaningful and relevant for themselves and other classmates. This was followed by asking what role instructors could play in promoting an atmosphere of curiosity and experimentation and what role they would play. The final four questions were directed at understanding individual learning outcomes and how these outcomes were facilitated within a graduate school program. These final questions were reconstructive in nature and were expected to shed light on further individual contextual factors.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot testing of the initial four questionnaire and four interview questions was conducted with one participant, at which time it was determined that two questions needed to be reworded for clarity. It was also determined that the data provided only descriptive and analytical answers and did not reveal enough of the deeper meaning perspective desired. After the pilot, it was decided to combine both the four questionnaire and four interview questions into the questionnaire and to develop a new series of metacognitive, reconstructive, and evaluative questions (Mitchell & Coltrinari, in press) for the interview. This was subsequently done, piloted with the same participant, and moved forward as the final product.

### **Selection of Participants**

I employed purposive sampling (Neuman, 1997) of fellow graduate students who had taken all of their intake courses and had been in the program for at least 1 year. The purposive sampling was chosen to select "particular types of cases for in-depth investigation" (1997, p. 206). I had access to five of these students from my own class



contact lists and already had established rapport with many of them; two important aspects of interviewing (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Neuman, 1997). Two participants, whom I met at a graduate conference held in September 1999, expressed a keen interest in participating in this study. In order to select further participants, I used snowball sampling, which provided the remainder of the participants. In snowball sampling, participants are asked to name other people who they feel would be suitable for the study (Neuman, 1997). This was a multistage process, which also involved four students recently graduated from the Master of Education program. Saturation point was reached with nine participants, at which time the territory appeared to have been thoroughly covered.

### **Procedures**

Predata collection activities were undertaken to solicit participation and to inform participants. Initially, 7 prospective participants were contacted via e-mail from class contact lists. A cover letter was sent to these individuals with an invitation to participate in this research project along with a brief cover story, as described by Glesne and Peshkin (1992); (see Appendix C). The cover story explained the research objectives and the expected level of participation that would be required. Of the seven who were initially contacted, three individuals returned a positive response. Arrangements were made for an initial meeting to explain in further detail the purpose of the research, to obtain a signed consent form from the participant, and to deliver a copy of the research questionnaire. The remaining participants were contacted in a similar fashion. Questionnaires were usually returned at the time the interview was conducted. On three occasions, participants had not



yet filled out their questionnaire and it became part of the interview process for the participants convenience.

### **Data Collecting and Recording**

Upon receiving the returned research questionnaire from the participants, arrangements were made for a second meeting time to conduct the interview. The interviews ran in duration from one to two hours and were tape-recorded, with the participants' permission. The selection of the interview site was determined by the participants. The site locations were either the participant's home, a classroom at the university, or a neutral meeting location such as a quiet restaurant.

Two methods of data collection acted as a validity check to each method. Comparisons were made of the critical incident responses and the interview responses for congruency. Member validation occurs when a researcher brings the field results back to the participant members after the initial data collection, and the participant members determine the accuracy of the data (Neuman, 1997). Although I had initially intended to have an in-person meeting for member validation, this proved to be inconvenient for all participants. Therefore, member validation was conducted using electronic mail. A brief demographic questionnaire was sent to each member, along with the transcribed notes of their questionnaire and interview responses (see Appendix D). This demographic questionnaire was completed by all participants. Member validation occurred when all of the participants responded favourably to the accuracy of their transcribed questionnaire and interviews via e-mail.



### **Data Processing and Analysis**

The qualitative data analysis followed the methodology known as the constant comparative method (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). This form of analysis involved several stages. To prepare the data for analysis, all raw data were transcribed onto clearly readable typed notes. The total average page length of the transcribed data was 12.7 pages (questionnaire data was 4.6 pages and the interview data 8.1 pages). The data were printed onto different coloured paper for each participant's answers to provide easy coding to its original source (participant). Pseudonyms were attached to material directly quoted from the data to help maintain the personal focus of the data. Colour-coded data were initially sorted by data type: questionnaire questions 1-8 and interview questions 1-10, as well as additional recurring questions that arose during data collection. Data for each question were transferred onto bristolboard to visually aid the identification of patterns, themes, and ideas. These boards were used as a preliminary presentation of the data (see Tables F2-F3 in Appendix F).

To analyze the data across questionnaire and interview questions, the data were then divided into smaller pieces of data that held one complete sentence, phrase, or paragraph of meaningful thought. These are described by researchers as "chunks of meaning" (Marshall, 1981 as cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 128) or "units of meaning" in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1995 as cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 128). To begin analysis, the complete set of notes were read through three times and coded for themes. These themes followed both an inductive and deductive analysis.

First, inductive analysis was used to search for themes and patterns recurring in the



data. To conduct this analysis, data units that contained similar meanings were placed together and assigned a descriptive label. I purposely conducted the inductive analysis first. The final inductive themes were related to the three main questions of this study. The first question was: What were the critical incidents? From this question, three themes emerged that were related to time, people, and circumstances. In the second question, How were the incidents experienced?, two themes emerged, an emotional affective response and an analytical cognitive response. In the final question concerning what transformation resulted, the three themes that emerged were cognitive change, affective change, and contextual change.

The final stage of data analysis was a blending of the deductive and inductive analysis to capture both of these categories. This synthesis provided descriptive analysis as well as interpretation for theory building. The final blended categories were: the stage of the process, what were the feelings, what was happening, and what was the environment.

### **Methodological Assumptions**

A major assumption in this study was that the graduate program in a Faculty of Education of a university leads graduate students to some kind of personal transformation because of the structure and influence of the program on the adult learner. Another assumption was that graduate students could identify, through reflection of critical incidents, those events that have led to transformative learning and the triggers for those events.

Since this study involved the collection of self-reporting data, another assumption was that the participants would answer openly and honestly. To encourage open and honest reporting, I met the participants on two to three separate occasions to build rapport and trust.



In addition, cross-checking of the participant's written critical incident questionnaire and interview data was conducted. The practice of member checking with the research participants was practiced to ensure that an accurate description of their experience was recorded. All of these practices are recommended techniques for conducting qualitative research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Neuman, 1997).

### **Limitations**

One limitation of this study was researcher bias, which occurs when the collected data are filtered through the researcher's own perceptions, beliefs, and values. The researcher becomes the research instrument with inherent biases for how the data is interpreted (Neuman, 1997). This was anticipated to possibly influence the data negatively. To overcome this limitation, a reflective journal was used to write down ideas, questions, conversations that arose on the subject, and personal thoughts throughout the process of the research (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The journal was also used as a source for additional member checking of the original data and initial interpretations and questions. These strategies were used to highlight my own viewpoint, keep myself in tune with the data from the participants, and confront researcher bias.

The qualitative design limited the type and conditions of the instrumentation. The design limitations included:

1. The critical incidents studied do not constitute all there is to know about the participants' transformative learning experience.
2. The critical incidents represent one incident in time and therefore do not allow for a comprehensive look at the entire graduate-student experience.



3. The qualitative nature of this study limited the collection and interpretation of data to one researcher and nine participants.
4. The use of open-ended questions meant that more data might have been collected from some participants than others.
5. The inductive themes derived from the data may not be the only components affecting transformative learning.

The design also limited the conditions for choosing the participants, collecting the data, and the boundaries of this study.

1. Participants were self-identified graduate students who experienced transformative learning.
2. Participants were restricted to graduate students in a Faculty of Education within the same university graduate program.
3. Participants were limited to full- or part-time students who had completed at least 1 full year of graduate studies or all of their intake courses.
4. Data were collected through a questionnaire and interview.
5. Data were collected over 2 months.
6. Data were limited within the boundary of transformative learning and did not consider other types of knowledge or learning.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study was conducted according to the Brock University Faculty Handbook using the guidelines stated in the Principles of Ethical Research with Human Participants. I used pseudonyms for all participants to maintain anonymity and maintain the personal



nature of the data. An informed consent form (see Appendix E) was used to outline the parameters, purpose, and uses of the data collected for this study and was signed by each participant at the initial meeting. Brock University's Sub-Committee on Research with Human Participants approved this study and the Informed Consent Form. Further ethical considerations were made just prior to the oral defense of this thesis. Steps were taken to guarantee the anonymity of the participants when an external proof- reader was able to identify one of the participants in this study. These steps included going back to each of the participants, making the concern of protecting their anonymity known, and asking them for any revisions to the text or changes that they wanted made. Although only one participant requested minor alterations at this time, it was decided by the committee, subsequent to the oral defense, that certain details be removed to further protect the participants' anonymity.

### **Restatement of the Problem**

Transformative learning is a unique learning process requiring reflection, as well as other ways of knowing, from adults. This process involves recognition of an individual's experiences, assumptions, and meaning perspectives, and the significant influence of contextual factors to their learning. Critical incidents can help educators to understand the events that engage graduate students in this process, as well as to understand the varying nature of the triggers that act as catalyst to these events. An in-depth study such as this can offer support of practical experience and help to answer some of the difficult questions that have arisen surrounding the practice of fostering transformative learning at the graduate school level.



### Summary of the Chapter

This chapter outlined the steps followed in conducting this qualitative study. Reasons for choosing the phenomenological qualitative research design had to do with wanting to hear graduate students' own voice concerning their experience of transformative learning. Several studies also influenced the research design. These helped me in limiting my study to specify certain criteria of graduate students, such as their study in the field of education, and the length of time they have been within the program. These studies also prompted me to sharpen my focus of study on a specific aspect of transformative learning. This resulted in the study of critical incidents. Other design factors were also influenced by other studies, such as the terminology used, design of the research instrument, and the purpose for the study.

A description of the constructivist research methodology and critical and interpretive approaches were presented. The change of focus and the spiraling nature of the research path were conveyed along with the new questions that emerged. These questions related to social context, the passage of time, and sequence of events of the participants' experiences with the objective of building the interpretative narratives. Instrumentation was considered next with a description of critical incidents, triggering events, and design and sample of questions used. A description of the process of the pilot study and subsequent developments were reiterated. The process of choosing participants was described as being multistaged and included both purposive sampling as well as snowball sampling. The procedure for implementing the study was given including introducing the nine participants. Data collection and recording included the use of a



questionnaire and interview process. All interviews were tape-recorded. Processing the data involved transcribing the questionnaire and tape-recorded interviews onto a word processor. The constant comparative method of analysis was described in detail. The themes that emerged from the inductive analysis related to the critical incidents were time, people, and circumstances. Two response themes emerged related to the experience of the incidents, an emotional response and a cognitive response. Three themes emerged related to results of the transformation which were cognitive, affective, and contextual change. Finally, a synthesis of the deductive and inductive analysis revealed four categories: the stage of the process, what were the feelings, what was happening, and what was the environment.

The chapter considered methodological assumptions. One of the methodological assumptions was that graduate students should experience transformative learning in university. Another methodological assumption was that graduate students could self-identify their transformative learning experience and would be articulate and self-aware enough to describe them. Limitations of this study included researcher bias; limitations relating to the specific design type and conditions; and limitations in choosing participants, collection of the data, and the boundary of transformative learning. Ethical considerations were addressed to show compliance with university research standards involving human participants. Finally, the problem originally presented in chapter 1 was restated and clarified for relevance and practical application.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter presents the findings of a qualitative research study. The purpose of the study was to explore the events that engaged graduate students in transformative learning. In order to understand this phenomenon, data were collected from two sources: critical incident questionnaires and in-depth reflective interviews. Specifically, I wanted to know what critical incidents were identified by graduate students who self-identified as having undergone transformative learning, how the incidents were experienced, and what happened as a result of the incidents. In order to understand the individual contextual factors of each participant, I also asked participants to describe their background and what they felt they brought with them into the program. This chapter sets out to address all of these questions.

The chapter begins with an interpretive description of the personal profiles of the graduates, including education, past and present work experience, and a summary of the personal data collected from the participants. Next, an interpretative description of the participants' critical incidents of their transformative learning experience are presented in narrative form.

The next section is a descriptive interpretation of how the critical incidents were experienced, including cognitive and affective experiences. The next section examines what transformation resulted in the participants, which included cognitive changes, affective changes, and contextual changes. The quotations of participants have been



untouched other than grammatical changes. Each of the themes are introduced at the beginning of the section and summarized at the end of each section. Furthermore, an interpretation of the findings is provided at the end of this chapter.

### **Who are the Graduate Students?**

All of the individuals involved in this study met the criteria for participation, which was that they had all self-identified as having experienced transformative learning while in a Master of Education program. Also, they had spent a minimum of 1 year in graduate school or had completed all of their intake courses in the graduate program. The section begins with an introduction of the participants, through a brief interpretive description of their lives. This narrative of the graduate students is intended to provide necessary context to the lives of the participants and situate them historically, culturally, and personally.

#### **Joanne**

Joanne was a single woman in her late 20s. She had an undergraduate degree in natural Sciences as well as a 2-year diploma in outdoor recreational management. Her past goal was to open her own business offering wilderness canoe trips “in order to share with others my belief in the potential of outdoor experiences to cause personal growth.” However, after working in the recreation industry she realized that what she was interested in was a better fit with education than with recreation, as the canoe trip participants she worked with were generally looking for a vacation rather than for



personal growth. In addition, she was concerned that working solely in the recreation industry would not enable her to support a family

Instructors from her outdoor recreation management program suggested that she should pursue a Master's degree as they were always looking for females to instruct in their program. A friend who was already involved in a Master of Education degree made her aware that she could pursue Master's studies congruent with her background and personal beliefs.

Her past educational experiences in a university and college setting were positive ones. However, Joanne voiced her insecurities about going into graduate studies: "I was worried that I wouldn't do as well in my master's work and that I would be disappointed with my grades." She enrolled into the graduate program to study Adventure Education.

She described herself as "a very driven person," "an idealist, but also a pragmatist--I like things to be useful-- and not only theoretical." She also stated that she takes life seriously and she tries to put 100% effort, and in return, expects a lot out of life. Joanne described the first year of her graduate experience as "the best year of my life so far" and was confident that her future interests in doctoral studies would continue to be balanced with her personal beliefs.

### Gwen

Gwen was a married woman with two adult children and a supportive spouse. Her spouse pursued a Master of Education degree at the same time as Gwen. She



graduated, specializing in Foundations of Learning and Teaching and at the time of this study was pursuing further education. She was also considering pursuing doctoral studies in the future.

Gwen was in her late 40s and initially went back to university, after a long hiatus, as a mature student to obtain her undergraduate degree. Her background experiences with her children, in a variety of alternative schooling, were the focus of her initial parental perspective of education. She expressed her personal belief that parents and teachers need to work together and to communicate to bring up a child. Gwen described a change in her own perspective of education as developing first from a parental perspective, second, to a learner's perspective and now, to a teacher/trainer's perspective. Within the graduate program itself, she had felt herself to be an outsider.

Her past work experiences included a variety of volunteer and clerical duties at schools. She valued her past work experiences but felt insecurities because of her lack of formal education up to the present. Gwen described herself as a lifelong learner and a rebel. She saw herself as a "hands-on" type of person who enjoys new challenges.

### Willy

Willy was a single female in her late 20s with international teaching and travel experiences. She expressed the difficulty in describing her background because of her belief that "my whole life's experiences are related and connected to where I am at any given moment." She described a traumatic and fragmented childhood memory, which left her feeling insecure. "I have always been insecure about school because of this."



Her feelings of insecurity continued with her throughout her undergraduate studies in education. She stated: “I was intimidated”; “I just felt out of place.”

When it came to graduate studies, Willy’s confidence had been somewhat improved because of international work and travel experiences. She had also completed some university courses in a foreign country while teaching, so she felt that she had something to offer because of her background experiences. Nonetheless, the insecurities of her childhood were still evident prior to graduate school: “I was terribly intimidated because I didn’t know if I was capable enough for a graduate program. I was terribly insecure when it came to school.”

Willy finished her graduate degree, within a year of starting it, and studied Curriculum. She chose this area of study because “I thought it a convenient and economical move to obtain a master’s degree in the field. I thought I’d be able to work wherever I wanted with the master’s degree.”

### Jennifer

Jennifer was a separated woman in her late 30s with two young children in her immediate care. Her separation occurred during her graduate studies of Foundations in Teaching and Learning.

Jennifer’s background education included a Bachelor of Arts degree with some additional graduate courses in teaching and language in higher education. She had also held some Teaching and Research Assistantships in her undergraduate studies. She said



that she had always loved learning and personally believed that education needs to be meaningful and relevant to the individual learner, as this comment suggested:

You have to have your own questions about life and if you can make those questions and those interests a part of your learning process, then it becomes learning centered and it becomes learner meaningful.

Jennifer spoke in vague terms about her childhood. She described herself now as “a growing socialist/feminist sociologist, interested in diversity of all aspects, especially as it relates to dynamics of work.” Jennifer graduated and was pursuing doctoral work in sociology and equity studies at the time of this study.

### Stephanie

Stephanie was a female in her late 40s with two teenage daughters. She experienced marital difficulties and permanently separated from after her graduation from the Master of Education program. She studied Foundations in Learning and Teaching. She was not presently working or studying but she intended to apply for doctoral studies to continue investigating the research she began for her undergraduate psychology thesis and master’s thesis.

Stephanie described herself as being an only child “from a family of very stubborn people.” Stephanie’s prior work experiences included a variety of volunteer activities and office administrative duties. She spoke often of her goals for her teenage children in context of her own educational goals and how these informed one another.



Stephanie personally believed in the importance of feeling respected and being able to “let go” of preconceived ideas, in order for learning to occur. Stephanie felt “overwhelmed in the M.Ed. program” until she made the connection of what she wanted to study for her thesis. Her thesis ended up being personally relevant to her own graduate experience as a mature woman. Stephanie expressed interest to develop her research further in doctoral studies in the future.

### Aaron

Aaron was a single male in his late 20s pursuing his master’s degree on a part-time basis in Integrated Studies. He focused on technology in education. Aaron taught computer science to undergraduate students and worked extensively in positions as teaching and research assistantships. Aaron was working full-time during this study, as a network systems administrator and had several part-time jobs as a computer consultant.

Aaron did not speak much about his childhood experiences or familial relationship, only to state that he has not seen his parents for over 10 years. He described them both as academics that have an “autocratic, old style” notion of education. He personally believed in a transactional environment for education to flourish where sufficient time and integration can take place for learning to occur. Aaron showed an interest in pursuing doctoral studies in the future.



### Brian

Brian was a male in his 30s currently working as a full-time student on his proposal during this study. He had a Bachelor of Education and a Bachelor of Arts. His master's studies were within the Foundations of Learning and Teaching field. Brian had considerable experience in teaching and research assistantships, which he highly valued. He was also teaching at the university he attends while completing his master's studies.

Brian valued the joy of learning for its own sake and considered emancipation an important part of his personal philosophy of education. He saw little difference between the role of teacher and learner. He had applied to several doctoral programs.

### Philip

Philip was a male in his late 20s, married with two young children. His undergraduate experience included a Bachelor of Arts degree. Philip was pursuing full-time studies in the field of Organizational and Administrative Studies in Education. He was excited about starting the graduate program. He valued the opportunity to generate extra income while gaining valuable work experience in a number of research assistantships within in the program.

Philip believed that you can learn from "every single person that you meet in life." He appreciated working as a Teacher Assistant in a situation where he felt valued and respected. He had been offered a fellowship position in a related Doctoral Program, which he considered. Philip hoped to have a career as an academic.



### Roger

Roger was a middle-aged male who graduated from the program as a full-time student some time ago and was pursuing his doctoral studies while teaching at the university during the time of this study. Like Aaron, his studies focused on Integrated Studies, with a focus on technology in education.

Roger's background was as a statistical and computer trainer. He described his beliefs as follows: "I believed or tended to view, teaching as a transmission of my knowledge to others and a facilitation of learner understanding by providing appropriate examples and exercises." At the time of this study, he considered more the "facilitating" aspect of teaching and learning. Roger enjoyed the opportunities to work with a variety of faculty members while pursuing graduate studies.

### Summary of Participants' Personal Data

There were 4 male and 5 female participants. Three of the participants were married with children, 4 were unmarried with no children, and 2 were separated or divorced with children in their direct care. Eight of the 9 participants gave details of their past education when asked to describe their background. Four participants mentioned prior work and travel experience. Two participants relayed information about their family and childhood. Seven participants mentioned either how they got into the program, what they felt they needed to get out of the program, or the kind of research work they wanted to do.



The deductive summary given above is in sharp contrast to the descriptive narrative earlier in this chapter. This illustrates the importance of viewing the participants in this study as unique individuals rather than simply as numbers. The participants did not live or learn in a vacuum but were being influenced and molded by their stage of life, personal experiences, familial and cultural conditioning, and even historical events. The data revealed many clear indications that learning was situated within and influenced by personal, social, and historical factors.

### **What Were the Critical Incidents?**

The 9 participants in this study were asked to describe critical incidents while in the graduate program. The first was a general incident to identify their “most vivid incident that led to profound cognitive and affective changes” for them as graduate students (see Table F2, Appendix F). The second was a more specific question to describe a critical incident when they experienced a “GINTOT,” that is, when they thought to themselves or aloud, “Gee, I never thought of that” (see Table F3, Appendix F).

The data unexpectedly revealed a pattern of critical incidents that occurred prior to graduate school that were self-identified by the participants as having a significant influence on their transformative learning within graduate school. Three themes emerged from these critical incidents: (1) time-related, (2) people-related, and (3) circumstances-related incidents.



### Time-Related Critical Incidents

The incidents that fell within the time-related theme could be distinguished as incidents that occurred in (1) childhood, (2) adult life (prior to graduate school), and (3) the graduate program. This was an unusual result because the critical incident questionnaire had specifically asked for critical incidents only within the graduate program. However, in spite of this, other incidents were found throughout the interview data that occurred outside of the graduate program and that most often emerged as incidents on which the graduate students placed even greater significance. The other incidents were always connected to the critical incidents described within the graduate program. That is, the critical incidents that occurred earlier in life appeared to have culminated in the critical incidents that occurred in graduate school.

### Childhood Incidents

The most prevalent childhood incidents related to the participants' immediate family situation. The incidents caused a physical or emotional anxiety for which the participants compensated throughout their life and continued to do so into the graduate program.

Willy's account of being abducted by her father was the most blatant of the childhood incidents. It occurred when her natural father abducted her for 5 years, when she was 4 ½ years old. She was separated from her natural mother because of this abduction. She was the eldest child with three other stepsiblings of her father and girlfriend.



I had no one to relate to in my childhood. I did not know I had a mother, and still find this concept difficult to grasp. I was never close to my father. He's a very difficult man. My half-sisters would often pick on me because they were my stepmother's children, and she hated me. Probably blaming me for having caused her life to develop as it had.

Willy missed considerable amounts of schooling because of constantly being on the move. Her emotional scarring was evident in her comments: "I just remember my whole school experience as being very painful--very difficult. When I look back now, I can see I was terribly emotionally stunted." This familial experience resulted in severe insecurities, which were evident from many of Willy's comments:

I had no friends because we were constantly moving (11 public schools in 3 years). Although I wouldn't have been able to articulate it--I was a disconnected, abandoned child. School was something that had to be done, but I had no concept as to why I was doing anything I was. School was a kind of enigma. No why, or how, ever entered my mind--I went through life as an automaton, but would feel badly if I did something wrong.

Willy's data indicated that she lacked the verbal command to express what she felt and also, the ability to understand it.

I do not have memories of those 5 years, nor did I instantly regain the ability to remember things when I was back with my mother. If something happened that was important, like if I traveled with my mother, and aunt, and cousin



somewhere, I wouldn't remember anything about it. They would say, "Don't you remember going to Texas last year?", and I won't remember anything at all.

Gwen's data related several incidents where she repeatedly described herself as being the "unwanted child" of her parents. She connected her dedication and interest in her own children's schooling to these childhood incidents.

Because I wasn't the wanted child and I knew that. My children were going to know from day one that they were the wanted children and that is probably why I wanted special, special education for them.

In addition to the messages of being an unwanted child from her parents, Gwen also recounted an incident from her childhood that involved messages of gender stereotyping. She was influenced in her decision not to pursue further education after high school by both her family and from authority figures at school. She described this as being the context of life in the 1960s:

In my class in Grade 13, the three guys, all of who were going into engineering -- getting their degree for a job and I went into being a secretary and my marks were as good as their marks. So how are we programmed? You know, it was in the 60s and I sat there and just kind of sighed for the little girl that I was, that nobody said, "Go to university, no matter what because you are as smart as, if not smarter than, those boys are. And just because you are a girl, don't accept the lower thing." And it was almost my crying for myself and realizing how stupid I was.



Brian gave a lonely description of his childhood and an unhappy family situation.

I've always had, it has always been a part of me (which has to do with my past), that I've had self-esteem problems since I don't know when. I don't come from a very happy home. I don't come from a happy family situation.

Stephanie described an incident related to difficulties she encountered because of a hearing impairment. Although this impairment was not cited directly as a critical incident in her childhood, it is alluded to as originating in her childhood. She had however, put her earlier schooling experiences, like Gwen, within a context of life defined by a specific period.

Education for me, obviously, comes from my experience as a child. Going to school in the 1950s, Catholic school at that...very authoritarian.

The data did not reveal to what degree Stephanie's hearing impairment affected her schooling. However, it did reveal strong insecurities in her childhood as this quote suggested: "I remember as a child I used to hide in the back of the classroom so I wouldn't be asked a question or I would cringe."

All of the childhood incidents referred to in the interview data were verbalized in such a way as to suggest deep-seated pain associated with these memories. Strongly felt emotions were described, such as loneliness, sadness, insecurity, and abandonment. Separation and isolation were manifested in a variety of different situations and were recurrent. These childhood life incidents continued to cause anxiety and difficulty for these individuals throughout their lifetime.



### Adult Life Incidents

The next group of time-related incidents fell within the category of having occurred as adult life incidents. These generally took place 3 to 5 years prior to entering graduate school and most often occurred while in undergraduate studies or in events closely associated with undergraduate studies.

Gwen considered her undergraduate experience as being work, hard work. However, her comments about her undergraduate studies seem to be grounded in the domestic responsibilities she also carried at the time.

Someone asked me if I was having fun yet, and I burst out laughing at them and said, “You’ve got to be kidding! I have two kids, a husband, a home, and I’m doing a full-time degree. Where is the fun?” And I didn’t have much of a social life...So I never found my undergraduate [studies] fun. It was just something I had to do for myself. To feel good about myself.

Brian also described critical incidents within his two prior undergraduate degrees that continued to influence him:

My experience upon graduating for the first time from university was a light bulb going off in my head that said, “I don’t really know anything.” Then the second time, it was like, “Yes, I don’t know anything but now I know that I don’t know anything.” Enlightened uncertainty is now the position I occupy. And it is something uncomfortable but very good.

Jennifer spoke in detail of particular painful memories of her undergraduate experience because of one profoundly negative incident, which she describes as a



“mental rape.” This was a critical incident prior to entering the graduate program, which happened during a short conversation with a male professor but had stayed with her:

The question [he] asked totally shattered my identity. It totally shattered me. I didn't even know where I was. I had no confidence left, nothing. And since then, I've been trying to get out of that place.

Stephanie considered that most of her transformative learning happened to her during her undergraduate experience. She related the reason for this not only to her marital problems but also to the stage in her adult development where she felt she was “just ready for change.” She spoke of this in terms of her internal motivations:

What internally motivated me were problems in my life with my spouse at the time. And I wanted to do better for myself. So that was a critical life event that was happening. On top of that, I was pushing 40. I was 38 when my grandmother passed away, so you realize you are getting older.

Willy spoke in considerable detail about her time teaching and traveling in Korea after her undergraduate studies:

I had this feeling that I could achieve almost anything because I had lived in Asia for 2 ½ years and I had seen how success is made through hard work, which meant long hours.

Philip identified a significant incident prior to beginning university involving his study of karate and the confidence it gave him to go back to school. “It is interesting, before I came back to university, I joined karate and I think that training



gave me the confidence to try new things. I trained for 2 years and found that, 'Hey, I can achieve things'." He discussed how he valued the external rewards from his martial arts and how that eventually changed to more internal rewards, such as "learning how to discipline your body to actually achieve different goals in life."

Roger had a Bachelor of Education degree and worked within industry as a statistical and computer technology trainer for about 10 years. His objective in the Master of Education program was to develop professionally, as he felt the timing was right to make a gradual career change. "I enrolled in the Master of Education program as a means of professional development and then found it was an opportunity to change careers laterally, rather than dramatically." Roger's incident could also be considered as circumstance-related because of the change in his circumstance from employment to that of student.

The adult life incidents described by these participants reveal mitigating influences that relate to general circumstances of the adult life cycle, micro- and macro-environmental factors and the embeddedness of these circumstances within and between spheres. Data revealed that general milestones in an adult's life, such as turning 40 years old and the death of a grandmother, gave fertile ground for self-reflection. Macro-environmental factors were also mentioned, such as gender-related trends influencing further education as well as employment choices that were available during particular decades. The micro-environment of marital status, child care, and domestic and work responsibilities all influenced students significantly but differently,



depending on the level of support and past education or work experience the participants had.

### Graduate School Incidents

The incidents that were described at the time of the graduate program were described as single incidents by most of the students. However, 3 of the participants could not identify a specific single event but described their incidents more as an unfolding process, either within a course, a number of courses, or throughout the whole program.

For Jennifer, the process was situated within a particular course. Her data revealed a personal journey of self-exploration:

A most profound change occurred for me when I first began to understand what patriarchy meant for me as an individual and for society. This learning began in the context of a classroom, with instructor and colleagues. When I began to learn about different feminist theories, I began to understand my life, and various events in my life, in new ways.

Graduate school gave her permission to reevaluate her past experiences. It gave her the language to verbalize it and helped her to see and understand it:

It is not that learning it, you created it, but learning gave you the vocabulary to communicate it, and to see it and to understand it. It doesn't mean that before it wasn't there but now you see it.



Jennifer continually referred to her incidents as a process where she now understood and could make sense out of her life.

A very vivid “GINTOT” for me, is when I first saw the video “Who’s Counting” by New Zealand feminist economist Marilyn Waring. This video revealed how the interplay of patriarchy and capitalism keeps invisible and unvalued much of woman’s unpaid work. I began to understand how unpaid domestic labour actually accounts for about 40% of GDP, even though, it is unpaid. And how much of women’s oppression is systematically perpetuated.

The data indicated that Jennifer made sense out of her past and developed an understanding from her new knowledge that had both practical application and relevance to her life:

Both [incidents] were very positive, teaching me something that I have not forgotten and which I still apply to my life today in trying to clarify confusion. The learning that took place in both events gave me tools to better understand my life as an individual and as a part of a capitalist/patriarchal society.

Willy described the process as a number of incidents that took place in several classes. “I can’t pinpoint any one incident.” She questioned the fairness of education, especially in relation to her traumatic childhood experience in school:

Another aspect that hit me was the unfairness of education. That if something isn’t technical, in other words, if there isn’t a right or a wrong, then the judgement of the teacher really depends on their personality and how your personality coincides with theirs....It just reinforced my thinking that school’s



not fair, and that when I was younger so much depended on my marks, and that the teachers had in their hands a terrible amount of influence and that their own ability to judge was terribly precarious. And so I thought, though I had such strong feelings and attachment towards my school environment and felt terribly injured if I did poorer than others, in fact, this may not have been the case, only the teacher's perception. So much depended on the teacher's own personality in relation to your own.

Willy also described her disappointment with the content of the courses she was taking, her marks, and what she learned from certain courses. In a class where she obtained a good mark, she stated: "I hadn't really gotten much out of the course." However, in other classes that she highly valued for the learning, her disappointment was more directed at the other students:

In another class, I really liked the professor and was getting a lot out of the lectures, but everyone else from my program found the guy to be boring and useless....A couple of other people from outside my TESL stream were also in the class, and some of them thought he was great too. I started to wonder just how smart these TESL people really were. I mean this guy was full of ideas and they just weren't picking up, on them, or thought it a waste of time. I was starting to become very disappointed in my TESL program.

These data reveal a process whereby Willy was coming to terms with past experiences and new knowledge. The educational setting where the new knowledge was presented was an important factor in the process. This appeared to be because of Willy's prior



expectations of what a graduate program was like. Often times her disappointment was aggravated by other students:

I was somewhat surprised that one of the girls in my class of eight could be in graduate school. She was loud and had absolutely nothing to say. She was annoying me. I thought, how could someone like this be here? As time went on, and we were assigned more and more readings, she always picked up on the insignificant things and wasted our time having us listen to her.

The process for Willy did not seem as though it had peaked while in the graduate program. Rather, she was still within the process of sorting and understanding what happened to her, both within the graduate program and in her past experiences. Her answers conveyed a serious tone of frustration and ongoing wrestling with her graduate school experience.

The data revealed that the process did, however, reach culmination once she finished graduate school, when she was able to recognize that her personal beliefs did not fit within the system of education she was employed in, as this comment suggests:

What hit me was how I was perpetuating a system I didn't believe in with the teaching of English as a Second Language. It was somewhat missionary-like. I could justify that I was providing students with the skills needed in order to compete in an English-speaking global economy but I really felt frustrated.... So I see my responsibility within the system, and see that I've been granted certain permission with the M.Ed. to work in implementing and perpetuating the system, but I don't believe in what I'm doing.



For Aaron, the process was situated within the whole graduate program. It seemed as though Aaron needed permission, as well, to explore:

This program provided the opportunity to explore things at my own pace, at my own grade, at other venues, and that's where I was able to work on these skills, such as library, my own writing, and trying to think of ways of integrating technology into curriculum and teaching practices.

For Aaron, his self-exploration was focused on his future goals, whereas Jennifer's self-exploration was clearly focused on making sense of her past.

#### Summary of Time-Related Incidents

It appeared from the data that the farther back the incident occurred, the broader the period was that the incident covered. For instance, Willy's childhood incident began when she was just 4 ½ years old and spanned over 5 years. Gwen and Stephanie spoke of incidents occurring over a decade in the 1950s and 1960s.

The next category of adult life incidents generally occurred, 3 to 5 years, prior to graduate school and covered a lengthier time than the graduate school incidents. The adult life incidents primarily took place during undergraduate studies or during employment. The time-related incidents that occurred while in the graduate program were often described within short spans of time. For the majority of the participants, the incident appeared to have taken place in less time than an hour and, for some, even within minutes.



### People-Related Incidents

The second major theme of the critical incidents was people-related and distinguishable between people within the university and people from outside the university. The majority of the incidents that were people-related within the university involved an adult instructor and described as a single incident within the graduate program. The description of the people-related incidents from outside of the university came as a surprise often leading participants to describe critical incidents of past childhood experiences. The ongoing evolving dynamics of familial situations was a highly influential factor for the majority of the participants.

### People-Related Within the University

Although these incidents varied in form, they always involved direct stimulation from an adult educator, not necessarily the instructor of the student. These incidents included personal discussions, special lectures, class activities, writing and publication of papers, and attendance at conferences. Four out of the 9 participants described events where they were engaged in specific class activities that required self-reflection. These activities included, specifically, journal writing for 2 individuals, the drawing of a model that defined organizational change for 1 person, and the writing of a paper for a course assignment along with the feedback and mark given for another. Two of the participants' events specifically were speaker related. One was during a one-on-one discussion with an advisor and the other was the result of having access to faculty because of employment at the university.



The data revealed in several places that the participants viewed lifelong learning as an important objective for themselves and instructors, as these comments indicate:

In the master's program, it felt like most of the people were learning. You know, they came off as writing articles, doing research...they all came off as lifelong learners to me who were really ready to listen to us and wanted something new. (Gwen)

I think that somebody that thinks, "Oh, I'm so good, I'm an expert in my field" and "I have nothing to learn from somebody else," they are not going to progress. The people that I want to be around are the people that want to continue learning and continue progressing. (Philip)

We learn from everything in life, not only in an institution, learning goes on forever, as opposed to you stop learning at 20, it keeps on going. People learn, people who like to treat themselves...I can relate to my former or current professors more on a level where I feel like I've come up a level. That's the biggest change, you've grown and you have reached a level almost the same as those who have taught you. And obviously by the time you've done your thesis, you have something you can teach them- the results of your thesis. And they can apply it or use what you have accomplished.... You are expected to produce now. They are waiting to learn from you. (Stephanie)



To be a good teacher you have to believe in what you do, I think. I don't believe in what I'm doing and there are few teachers that do, I think--except maybe at the university level--where the faculty keeps [sic] outside interests and keeps [sic] their minds active. (Willy)

The participants often described a supportive environment where educators had played an essential role in facilitating learning through a symbiotic relationship between instructor and student.

I started having conversations with people who paid attention to what I said and they took me seriously. And I never felt that people did that in undergraduate work; everyone was too busy to take me seriously. When I entered the master's program, people actually listened to what I said. They would say, "Hey, that's a good idea, maybe you should look at that" and it was that support really that triggered this....I had a supportive environment to work within, because somebody saw me as valuable and responsible enough to be given that kind of responsibility. (Brian)

You respected their knowledge and their work but you also realize that you have the ability to "teach" the professor, the professor can also learn from the student. It is symbiotic. Where they both learn from each other, they are giving information and getting you to build your own theories and it is a give and take. You are feeding on each other more or less. (Stephanie)



You have to earn respect, but when you receive respect from someone who is more knowledgeable than you; it makes you grow. It makes you feel more confident and part of your security makes you want to learn even more. I wish I had this ambition when I was 20. (Stephanie)

Predominantly, as far back as I can see most of the stuff I've been able to get out of the M.Ed. program has been the allowance [access] that I have had to faculty members. Not just class time and accessibility to them but going to them and talking about a problem. Talking about something brought up in class that might not have been clear to me, or how that applies to a different situation. But general talk also....It was in discussions with one instructor personally and it so happened we were biking on a bike trail and I went "Wow!" because of the implications that it has. I specifically remember the topic we were talking about. It was perceptual traditions and self-concept theory and it was how it was related and how he presented it to me that made me go "Wow." (Aaron)

I have talked to people who have been through the program, which was a personal impetus; I did that on my own. I did feel like that was valuable but in the last while, that was just entering the program, I've got most of my support from individuals who I've formed relationships with here in the Faculty of Education.... People I know and have formed relationships with at the university, I can talk to and they pretty much know and they share their research



and they share what they are doing with me. And I found it is a good collegial kind of an environment that way. (Brian)

Who better to mentor and provide suggestions than faculty who have already gone through the process and established themselves in a position wherein they have sort of made it already? There is bountiful [sic]to be learned from them. Not only in regards to how we conduct our lives academically but also some of the neat eccentric [things] that we might embody in our practice which might situate ourselves in an advantageous position. (Aaron)

I look at the teacher as somebody who can add, who can add to my knowledge. The teachers that work best with me were always the ones who used me almost as a colleague. And that's the advisor that I have right now. I was a TA for her. She talked with me and she worked with me as a colleague and respected that I had something to teach her, as much as she has something to teach me. (Philip)

I have learned by association with others how to write and how to present at conferences...I got to work with special projects and people that I didn't get a chance to do as an undergraduate. It would be the same in some business or work environments however. The only differences that I can think of would be between the part-time and the full-time graduate student experience. I doubt that



the part-time students get the same opportunities or experiences in their graduate studies. (Roger)

### Summary of People-Related Within the University

The data revealed that students often viewed their instructors as lifelong learners. They highly valued the access to faculty members in a variety of formal and informal settings. They also valued opportunities to work in research and teaching positions, where a great deal of learning occurred through association with a mentor and through transaction with educators in academic activities. Students valued a reciprocal learning environment with instructors in a relationship where mutual respect was paramount. Instructor feedback, encouragement, and support were the three most highly praised attributes, facilitating both cognitive and affective changes for the participants.

To summarize, the data indicated that permission to self-explore had been granted to the participants. Each of the incidents portrayed in the data, involving an adult educator or instructor, elaborated on some form of sanction given by the educator or instructor to the participants to go where they had not yet gone in their learning. This was a path, which required critical self-reflection with some level of ongoing communication between the instructor and student.



### People-Related Outside the University

A number of incidents conveyed a verbal image of other people, besides instructors, who influenced the participants. Many participants had been culturally conditioned by these other people to think in a certain way that was finally challenged while in graduate school. Almost all of the participants spoke of painful childhood memories involving familial relations that had continued to be strained into their adult years. Gwen, Brian, and Philip all used the term “blue-collar worker” to describe the social conditioning they felt highly influenced by from family members.

Gwen considered herself in the past to have a “secretary’s mentality” and related this once again to her upbringing:

The whole blue-collar thing of being raised by parents who say you can’t do this, you can’t go to university because it is just not what we do. And a mother, who says, every time I see her, “Have you got a job yet?”

Brain recalled similar incidents when he spoke of his family:

I come from a lot of blue-collar workers who told me that I was much better off digging a ditch than going to university. I don’t have good family relationships with those people and that has made life difficult in some ways.

Brian also described similar feelings of isolation within a larger social structure beyond his familial environment:



I can't be very specific about this but it has to do with my feeling lonely growing up and not having people with similar interests and questioning my self and wondering why I wasn't like other people doing similar things. Now, of course, I recognize that as being okay, but while I was growing up, I didn't recognize that as being okay. That really has been important and has stayed with me through my undergraduate studies as well.

Philip described his father as "always having had a negative view of education. He quit school when he was 16, you know, 'You don't need an education', type of thing, 'Go out and work'." He recognized a number of barriers that were put up from his childhood and social environment that were subsequently broken down during graduate school. Although Philip found this was positive, he described the difficulties he experienced at the time:

It is especially with things that you have grown up with, these are things that you don't take lightly; to make the transition and then once you've done that, there are the barriers that are put by people all around you and oftentimes they will reject you because you are no longer the person that they thought that you were or you are not upholding the same standards. I think that's why people from similar social stations relate to one another.

Two participants, Jennifer and Stephanie, spoke directly to marital problems that reached a crisis point while in the graduate program. Jennifer spoke about how her marriage breakup influenced her and how it was interconnected with her graduate studies:



I started graduate school with a husband but separated, thankfully. He really could not support my studies at all. He likes to blame this [my education] for it.

Of course, that's not the case. The problems were there but just got clarified.

I'm doing the single mom, student thing now.

Both Jennifer and Stephanie struggled with their spouses throughout their graduate program. The issues that they were confronted with became the basis for their thesis topics.

Stephanie's ongoing problems with an alcoholic husband caused her to want to carry on with her undergraduate thesis where she looked at emotions in relation to alcohol use. However, she realized the difficulties she would have with ethical issues and decided to change her focus based on a reflective journal writing exercise she did in graduate school:

We did a lot of personal journals and how I felt about the oddest things. I thought, okay, why not look at me, why I came here and why I came back to school at the age of 36 and the reason why I came back.

For both Stephanie and Jennifer, their spouses had a significant impact on their lives, which subsequently resulted in a repositioning of their personal lives. This influenced their learning within the program.

In contrast to the negative people-related incidents that were described by many of the participants, Philip described his graduate experience as having a positive impact on his marital relations. "Probably the place that I have noticed it the most is in my relationship with my wife and how much I have changed from when I started out at



university and going through the whole university experience.” As well, he noticed that the changes had helped him “to manage people well.”

Gwen also spoke of a positive relationship with her husband and the support he gave her during her graduate studies:

I go to my husband always, we just talk things over. We are, basically, we're best friends. Well, we're best friends in certain areas. Certainly, in education and learning. I'd ask him, “Do you think I can?” or “How do you think I can approach this?” ....he was an expert in the education field to begin with, so if I said, “I'm having a real problem with this” or I'd ask him about some jargon that I didn't understand because I'm not in the educational field, so I could say, “could you fill me in on this, so I know what they are talking about.” ....A lot of his friends were educators and they'd use acronyms and I'd say “Okay, what does this mean? I don't need it for my paper I just needed to know so I could say, ‘Yeah, or nay’.” I wouldn't have that if he was a manager at General Motors or worked in a factory or something.

Many of the participants mentioned the influence of academic friends outside of the university, who had already gone through the master's program. Gwen described this as an incident that had an important influence on her for good at the beginning of her graduate experience:

There was a woman who had gone through her Master's and she was the one who had done something on entrepreneurs. So I went to her. It was at the beginning because I went to her office and I said, “I'd like to do a similar



thing.” She sat me down and said, “Okay, these are the courses that I would take if I were you.” We sat down and we decided on what courses I should take. It wasn’t an advisor, I didn’t go afterward to an advisor and ask what they think. I just went on what she told me because it made perfectly good sense.

### Summary of People-Related Outside the University

A portion of the critical incidents that occurred during graduate school related to people outside the university. Parents of participants played a significant role regardless of the age of the graduate student. The influence of other extended family members was also mentioned. The data usually revealed familial relations as a negative form of conditioning that presented cultural barriers that were exposed, challenged, and ultimately broken down. Positive and negative comments were made about spousal relationships and the resulting influence of partners.

### Circumstance-Related Incidents

The final theme in the critical incidents was circumstance-related. Critical incidents related to circumstances fell into two main categories, direct and indirect circumstances. Direct circumstances had to do with critical incidents that occurred within the graduate program. Indirect circumstances had to do with critical incidents that occurred outside of the graduate program.



### Direct Circumstances

The majority of the critical incidents described as a “GINTOT” (See Table F3, Appendix F) were related to direct circumstances of class activities initiated by an instructor within the program. For 6 out of the 9 participants, GINTOTs occurred during a class activity. Of these, 2 were related to class discussions and the remaining 4 to a variety of activities, including the use of weekly insight cards, a video, and writing activities. Of the remaining 3 GINTOTs, 1 occurred during a one-on-one discussion with a professor during a graduate conference. The other 2 participants had GINTOTs while reading.

The variation in the types of activities might suggest that these are idiosyncratic to the individual. However, an alternate view indicates that the variation of activities gave flexibility and choices to participants. Allowances were made for personal preferences, skills ability, and the level of risk a student would venture in self-reflection. Participation in activities was, to a certain extent, voluntary and student engagement and commitment resulted. The following is a sampling of the comments of participants:

A package had arrived for me in the mail. It was a paper I had written for a class, and a full-page letter from the professor who had marked it....Receiving this letter was very rewarding, exciting, and somewhat overwhelming. I had put my “best effort” into the paper, and it was rewarding and exciting to find out that, at least this professor, viewed my best as exceptional. The enthusiasm and praise of this professor, on top of the other “successes” I had had so far in the



program, really made me feel as though I had finally found my niche....The triggers in both these incidents were the thoughts of my professors. In both cases, it was a trigger that made me think somewhat differently about myself. Because I respected these professors, I valued their thoughts and allowed them to affect my understanding and perceptions of myself. (Joanne)

I think it was the critical reflection and all the journal writing, looking into my self. That gave me focus on what I wanted to do and to have it be a useful study that maybe other people can expound on later....The trigger then was the exercise of the Life Mapping, where I had to reflect on critical incidents in my life and then seeing connections. The exercises made me think that externally I wanted to be a French teacher. That was my motivation for going in. But internally, I knew that my motivation was very much different than getting the results of an education. What internally motivated me was problems in my life with my spouse at the time. And I wanted to do better for myself. (Stephanie)

They brought in the professors from the Faculty of Education to speak on their own work, what they were doing, and what they were teaching as courses. So you got a broad view of all the administrative, curriculum, and theoretical aspects of education. A professor said to me "You'd belong [sic] great here, you'd be great with your psychology background. You belong in curriculum." And I thought, "How do you figure that?" All the while, I thought more so, that I



belonged in foundations, what brings people into education, the motivation for education. It just reinforced where I belong...the main thing was that I thought I didn't belong there and I kept thinking, "What am I doing here?" When I really realized that I still have a place in education and have something useful to offer. (Stephanie)

One of the incidents that comes to mind is when I was sitting in an Organizational Change class and our group was asked to draw a model that defined organizational change. I have used that model so many times when confronting difficult or unusual people in my travels. It helps me put perspective on people's behaviour. I understand the role that each person plays in an organization and that the "crazy" people, or people who take extreme positions in an organization are vital to maintaining balance in the organization. An interesting GINTOT experience was when I was completing the advanced quantitative research methods course. I was writing a paper on the chi-square analysis and I realized the importance of standardized residuals. That experience led to an amazing leap in my understanding of correlation and regression analysis as well. In both cases, the trigger had to be the challenge presented to me by my instructors. By presenting the challenge or creating the opportunity, I was able to increase my learning many times over. I had taken my learning experience as far as I could go with it but my instructors were able to present a small amount of



information that opened many doors to my understanding of the subject area.

(Brian)

I can identify the moment that I had a GINTOT, when I read the work of George Kelly, a constructivist psychologist. As soon as I picked up his psychology of personal constructs and read the first couple of chapters, it was like, not only did I never think of that, but also it is so obvious that I should have. But I was very grateful for the experience and what that's done and what effect it has had since.

(Philip)

Nothing comes to mind as a dramatic incident but there are a whole lot of little GINTOTs that happened on a regular basis in both my reading and in class discussions. I don't recall the specific triggers but I suggest that they were simply questions or ideas that were presented by others. (Roger)

#### Summary of Direct Circumstance-Related Incidents

In all of the GINTOTs described, the adult instructor played a major role, albeit oftentimes discreetly and often without realization of the extent of their personal impact on the student. Both of the reading incidents recounted were prompted by an adult educator in brief discussions held outside the classroom setting. The conference discussion referred to above was a casual comment by an educator, who was not the student's instructor but nonetheless had a powerful influence for good. The self-



reflection activities all required instructor encouragement, feedback, and support as students wrestled with profound cognitive changes and the associated feelings these conjured up.

Access to faculty was a critical prerequisite for GINTOT opportunities, which were played out in formal and informal settings. Social functions provided the surroundings for three of the incidents, and research assistantships provided the opportunity for several others. It was interesting that the classroom setting was only one of many places where critical incidents took place.

### Indirect Circumstances

Although the focus of the critical incidents was on the graduate program, several incidents corresponded to indirect circumstances outside the graduate program. These kinds of circumstances were conveyed with considerable reservation because they were of a private and sensitive nature.

It was apparent for Jennifer that the circumstances surrounding her marital problems were not only an important source of motivation for her studies but also a source of emotional strain during her graduate experience, as these comments suggest:

A lot of tough times also came from the juggling of work and family and that's actually what I did my thesis on....I'm actually happier right now than I was when I was trying to handle conflict on top of my studies.



Jennifer made connections between her mental rape incident and her motivation for going to graduate school. She also made connections, in part, to her marriage breakup:

I knew I had different interests and I knew I wanted to stay in academia. I had finally found a home there too. And that meant having to go back to the one place where I had my mental rape. It was really threatening and terrifying but there my guts spoke and I knew that I had to do this. That also had a lot to do with my final marriage breakup, because I knew that the one place I absolutely knew I had to go was the one place my husband didn't want me to go. I mean how supportive is that of me as a person?

The description of Jennifer's mental rape incident also suggested other abuses, without providing direct examples:

I've had a history of other abuse in my life that others might think, "Oh, that's got to be more traumatic." I've had 10 years of abuse in other ways, but this one moment [mental rape] put me in a place that those 10 years of abuse didn't do.

Another example of a compounding circumstance was related to Stephanie's childhood hearing problem, which made her rely heavily on lipreading. This physical impediment inhibited her from pursuing her original goal of becoming a French teacher in undergraduate studies and instead pursuing psychology and then education.



I'm very hearing impaired. And when I was in Laboratoire, I could not decipher without lipreading. And being a not very familiar language to me, I couldn't get it. So I had to forget about French. It was just too frustrating. Meanwhile, I was taking psychology....and I fell in love with psychology, being the analytical type of person that I am.

Aaron, like Stephanie, also had a circumstance related to a health issue. He described a serious illness several years prior to graduate studies that he connected to his present passion and receptivity to the field of education. He saw himself as being different from most of the other students because of this:

I was and would have been headed in the same direction [as other students] but my personal background, as to what I brought with me to this program, this had me question most of the beliefs that I held very dear and near to me. Those were shattered, so to speak, when I got ill. That was the last thing that I thought was going to happen, so that was just hitting right at the root of the whole thing.

Aaron's indirect circumstances of ill health provided a fertile environment and condition for transformative learning to take place as this next quote shows:

I enrolled in the [graduate] program in 1998. My illness was diagnosed in 1995-96, so there was a bit of time where I went through a depressive episode. But that made me question a lot of things and including some of the things that I hold dear and near to me. I realized, through that mulling, all the things that I had valued so much. Either they are wrong or they don't hold value for me anymore. So I came with the mindset where I would allow this education



program to do things to me. As much as, I would be able to shape it from my expertise and disposition.

These comments, along with other data, indicate that Aaron went through roughly a 2-year phase of serious self-exploration prior to graduate school. This self-examination and reflection had in many ways allowed him to identify and refocus on what beliefs he valued; preparing him to be open to accept new knowledge and further change.

#### Summary of Indirect Circumstance-Related Incidents

Many of the circumstances appeared to predispose participants to change, as in Aaron's case. Different forms of abuse, a physical handicap, and a serious illness were three indirect circumstances that participants cited as critical incidents. Most of the data in this section were of a private nature and was communicated with reservation due to the sensitivities involved.

#### Summary of Critical Incidents

The critical incidents identified by the participants in their transformative learning fell within three broad categories: time-related, people-related, and circumstance-related incidents. Surprisingly, many of the time-related critical incidents were described outside of the graduate program, occurred prior to graduate school and emerged as a pattern in the participant's life. The incidents were put into three time-related categories: childhood, adult life, and graduate school incidents.



Obvious relationships were visible in the time-related incidents. Participants who recited childhood incidents expressed deep feelings of separation and isolation to the point of describing an emotional and sometimes even physical anxiety that had been compensated for throughout their lives. All of the participants with childhood incidents conveyed a sadness and disturbance from their youth that left them feeling isolated, insecure, and sometimes abandoned into their adult years.

The adult life incidents were most often portrayed during undergraduate experiences and within the context of marital and domestic responsibilities. Work experiences, travel adventures, and new hobbies were highlighted also. All of the adult life incidents indicate that contextual factors played an important role in influencing the participants. The individual micro-environment was the most prominent of these contextual factors, as was expected. However, factors from the participants' macro-environment and basic adult life cycle were also visible in the data.

Often, the participants put a higher significance on the incidents that occurred prior to graduate school. Despite this, they considered the graduate school incidents to have solidified their understanding of these earlier incidents and to have brought a form of closure on old issues. Many of the prior adult life-incidents suggested that the students had a predisposition for change at the time they entered graduate school. The most recent incidents were described in the most detail and occurred in less time than prior incidents. Many of the circumstance-related incidents were communicated with reservation due to their sensitive and private nature. The graduate school incidents were



generally described as single incidents but also emerged as a process for three participants. The process did not always reach a peak in graduate school.

The adult educator was the central character in the people-related category of graduate school incidents, with both positive and negative descriptions. The data suggested that access to adult educators as well as their encouragement and feedback played an important role in the critical incidents of all of the participants, both in formal and informal learning settings.

A considerable number of incidents were described by participants involving other people outside the university. These incidents were generally perceived as being negative and involved the description of highly influential familial and cultural dynamics. Support and encouragement were frequently mentioned by participants as being vital, as old barriers were removed and new roles were taken on both within and outside the university.

The circumstance-related critical incidents fell into two categories: direct circumstances and indirect circumstances. The direct circumstances within the university were primarily experience-based activities. The actual activity itself did not appear to be of consequence as much as willingness to participate in the activity. Student engagement was evident in the learning activities. Flexibility and a variation of choices allowed for individual expression. Students took responsibility in their own learning process and showed commitment. The indirect circumstance-related data pointed out that, circumstances of ill health, physical and mental abuse, and a hearing impediment predisposed participants to change.



### **How Were the Incidents Experienced?**

This section extends the description of critical incidents by revealing how these incidents were experienced. To explore this phenomenon, the participants were asked to identify the triggering event that sparked the critical incidents they described. The triggers that they identified fell into three categories: (1) adult educator, (2) fellow students, and (3) class activities. I also asked the participants if they viewed the trigger as being negative or positive and why. The triggers for both of the critical incidents were described during the same question but are summarized with their corresponding critical incident (See Tables F2 and F3 in Appendix F). In the following sections, the affective and cognitive responses from the participants within the graduate program are presented.

#### **Emotional Responses**

Two emotional responses, disorientation and anger, were prevalent in the inductive analysis of the data. These emotions were often described both prior to entering the program and in conjunction with the occurrence of the critical incidents within the graduate program. These emotions tended to usher in a period of disintegration for the students, as old ways of thinking and old patterns of interacting came into question. Both of these responses are reasonable and predictable given the insecurity that most participants voiced. The vulnerability of many students was evident in their anxiety about not achieving academic success, not realizing personal goals, and not being accepted into a new social group.



### Disorientation

A feeling of disorientation was evident when participants spoke directly of something missing in their life or of feeling lost prior to the experience of the critical incidents. They also spoke of how the incidents finally put things back together for them while in the program.

Jennifer spoke of her triggers as helping her to “make sense for me out of my life” because she “had finally found a home.” Gwen spoke of the trigger of critiquing a movie she had seen years before but hadn’t really understood why it made her cry at the time:

And the whole thing to me was -- that’s how I feel.... That’s why I cried my eyes out earlier because I’m seeing what was done to us in the 1960s. And I’m crying for her in the 1800s but in essence I am crying my eyes out for me and I don’t think I was even recognizing it until this course.

Joanne described how her incident “...made me feel that I had finally found my niche.” Despite this positive feeling, she stated that she felt overwhelmed and worried she had “set a precedent that would be hard to follow.”

Willy found her trigger as what had been missing for years from her educational experiences: “I had to be much more independent in thought. I can’t rely emotionally on the instructor to help know the material.”

Stephanie described the incident of a brief conversation with a professor who told her she “belonged great” [sic] and that she really had a place in education with her



psychology background. "It just reinforced to me where I belong. When I really realized that I still have a place in education."

Aaron entered the field of education because he saw an element that was lacking in his skills development, which he described as "the human element, the humanities." He was interested in improving these skills, as well as research and writing skills, all of which, have been an important focus of his graduate work while working full-time.

Brian realized that he "would never be the same person" because of the incidents he experienced, which this comment revealed:

When I consider the ideas that have shaped my life, it is almost as if I am looking into a mirror that has been shattered. I throw a rock against that mirror of my life and I try to put the pieces back together. I realize that now, when I formulate the image in my head, it is a very different image than I had before.

Philip also recognized how he felt his life being pieced together. "When I completed my undergraduate degree I had knowledge but I didn't know how to put it together and I did not have the confidence to use what I knew."

The participants experienced a process of disintegration as old roles, responsibilities, and ways of knowing were challenged and subsequently broken down. Varying degrees of disorientation were described by the participants of their lives while in the program; for example, 3 participants used the term "shattered" and 4 participants used the term "piecing together." The variation was understandable considering the



differences in events and timing of critical incidents that transpired in participants' lives prior to graduate school.

Joanne and Roger both appeared to have had their self-confidence built up prior to entering graduate school by the professional development they were encouraged to pursue from their employment and former professors. Willy stated that her confidence was built up from working and traveling in Asia. Philip's narrative of what his study of karate had done for his self-confidence was another example. Brian and Aaron both had two other degrees that also supported a higher level of self-confidence. In contrast to these examples, Jennifer's and Stephanie's marital situations seemed to have had an eroding effect on their self-confidence. However, it also appeared to make them eager to search for meaning in their life and to be open to self-exploration. Aaron had gone through a lengthy process of self-exploration due to his prior illness, a process that was not evident in many of the other participants prior to graduate school.

The degree of anxiety that participants brought with them into graduate school suggests the level of insecurity and motivation for learning that participants felt. Stephanie, Aaron, Brian, Philip, and Roger all explicitly stated that they saw the graduate program as an opportunity for change. The degree of their anxiety was also affected by the support and encouragement, or lack thereof, provided in both the adult life and graduate school incidents. The timing and nature of previous experiences seriously affected how the feelings of disorientation played out for each individual within the program.



## Anger

In the affective responses, anger was the dominant emotion expressed with the actual experience of the critical incidents. The anger was always connected to previously experienced incidents, prior to the graduate program. Like the feelings of disorientation, the degree of anger depended on how these feelings had been handled previously. For example, Gwen expressed anger when she recognized the gender issues that influenced why she never went on to university after high school.

I think I was as angry at me than I was at anyone else because I didn't do it anyway, I didn't go ahead to university, I accepted my daddy saying "Don't go to university." Okay, daddy, that's fine!

Gwen's anger was intense because it was the first time that she identified prior incidents in her life and understood them in a new way. Her previous deep-seated feelings had never been acknowledged or understood:

My first course was Gender Issues, it sometimes made me very angry because I had never thought of things that other people were doing to me because I was female. Yet now I understood why I tend to do things.

Willy had continually expressed sentiments of anger about being abducted as a child and how that experience, still made her feel dependent upon being connected to other people's personalities. Her anger became intensified in the graduate program because she recognized that the repetitious pattern of insecurity throughout her life was still being played out in graduate school:



I went through periods, and am still now too, to some extent, of anger. I found that teachers I connected emotionally to right away in graduate school weren't the ones, in the end, I learned a lot from. So that changed a lot from before graduate school -- then the learning I did from a teacher was based on my ability to connect emotionally to them....Now [in graduate school] though, again I relied on the emotional connection, I noticed I wasn't necessarily getting any learning from those teachers. So in graduate school, I began to sway to a more intellectual connection -- that's to say, being able to study something without having an emotional connection to the teacher. Separating someone's personality from the content they are teaching. I don't know if this is necessarily a good thing -- but you don't have to like someone in order to appreciate them.

Both Jennifer and Stephanie spoke indirectly to feeling anger towards their spouses. Jennifer referred to it when she said, "that incident made me feel overwhelmed....it seemed very powerful to finally understand some things about my life that had until then only been mass confusion." Her anger was evident in her tone of voice when she spoke of the years of abuse she lived with and also when she spoke of the lack of support from her husband towards her academic pursuits.

Stephanie also admitted anger, specifically when her own thesis research revealed that anger was the most significant emotion she found:



Because when I ran the statistics, on the emotion, I'm going, "Wow, great, anger is the most significant, that's fantastic!" Because deep down that was what I felt. Anger was my specialty.

Many of the students expressed sentiments of resentment that suggested a lesser degree of anger. Brian's data revealed these sentiments when he discussed his past feelings of loneliness:

So the thread and the theme of being alone comes back again. It connected again with these events in being on my own and trusting myself enough to do this in a particular environment with which I respected and wanted to belong.

Jennifer expressed resentment as well to her traumatic undergraduate experience:

My own voice, that's what I lost at my previous university with that mental rape. I was made to feel like my voice was not at all adequate and up until then, I really felt that I had a voice.

The emotional response of anger appeared to be beneficial in these graduate student experiences. Although it smarted, as the cleansing of old wounds, it also promoted the process of healing and provided much of the motivation that was necessary for the participants to work through their anger.



### Analytical Cognitive Responses

Two cognitive responses emerged from the inductive data analysis, both of these involved the use of comparisons by the participants. The first was comparisons with other students, which included the student's status, motivation, focus, and receptivity to learning. The second was comparisons with other circumstances. This included what was relevant and meaningful to the circumstances of the participant's life at the time and it included opportunities for new roles, learning contexts, and academic pursuits.

#### Comparison With Other Students

An overriding theme within the analytical responses was that all of the participants saw themselves differently from most of the other students in the graduate program. Most of the students were studying full-time, did not have previous work experience in education, and were interested in pursuing further studies. This set them apart from most students who studied part-time, who worked in K-12 schools or other educational settings, and who were attending graduate school for career or professional development purposes. The participants also recognized a different level of motivation and focus for students, like themselves, who planned to go on to doctoral studies.

Brian's comments are echoed in most of the participants' data:

I think there is a big difference between someone who is a teacher and is going in there so they can become a vice principal and goes in to get their master's degree on that basis and somebody like ourselves, who goes in as non-teachers



[sic] and are looking for an education to become academics. I think there is a huge difference and I think that the two just don't mix.

Philip stated similar sentiments to Brian:

I had the feeling that you were an individual because of the nature of the program. Where the majority of the students are teachers coming in on a part-time basis to upgrade their skills, so they are living a different experience than the full-time M.Ed. students. I think that made it hard to compare with other people because it was more of an individual journey, than say for example, the people that are students in the psychology course. They all take similar courses together, they are students together, and they share offices as TAs and so they are, really, more of a group.

Willy made constant comparisons between her experience and other students in the classroom:

There seemed to be a big discrepancy on what was considered graduate level education. I mean, in the one class where they were talking about ideas in education, no one had been interested. Now in the grammar class, everyone was keen -- mainly because it was technical.

Gwen said she did not identify with individuals in education before or during graduate studies even though, she socialized with them most of her married life because of her husband's involvement in education. She viewed herself as a lifelong learner.

As a parent, I had no degree, as a young parent, and I always felt very conscientious about that because I hung out with people who had degrees. And



I had been a really, good student and learner but that had all stopped on an official capacity. I never stopped reading; I never stopped learning for myself....I didn't want to be a public school teacher and I didn't want to be a VP and I didn't want to be a Principal. In my little world, all the people that hobnob with me, that's why they would go in to get a master's degree, because that was the route they took....I don't know why I was doing a master's. And that really bothered me because I didn't have that, "Oh yeah, I'm going to be a ....." They need to categorize to some extent teachers, nurses, and others....I don't know how many "others" there are. There weren't many when I went through. I didn't find anyone else who was not a teacher or a nurse. I was the only one that I knew of in my little group and that was very difficult. I always felt like I was on an island by myself.

Aaron expressed a lot of concern about the short time frame that some students could complete a master's degree:

Even if I had the opportunity to go full-time, I would never enroll into a program full-time, just because of that criterion. In 1 year you could do your master's degree and become a master of a subject, when you may or may not have someone with any background in education. That is a scary concept. What sort of quality can you get out of it? To promote that or to increase those sorts of programs, seriously jeopardizes not only the quality of the stuff that those students who were enrolled into the program get but also the credibility of the paper that I get at the end of it.



Most of the participants also saw themselves as being thirsty for knowledge and more malleable than other students, as Aaron's comment indicated: "I came into the program much more pliable than the other people were." Philip also had a similar perspective of himself: "I would say more of as an individual that I tend to have high demands and a lot of goals. And the average person, I don't think, is willing to put that much effort into it." Brian traced back his love of learning to his childhood, especially with his love of reading. He described himself as "I've always had a thirst to know things."

Participants made comparisons with other students in regard to their educational and background experience. They also commented on differences between their motivation and that of their peers and suggested that their motivation made them highly receptive to the graduate learning experience. Several students thought that the focus of their own studies was intensified because of aspirations to go on to doctoral studies and make a career as an academic.

#### Comparisons With Other Circumstances

Comparisons with other circumstances were especially evident in the participants' descriptions of whether they viewed the triggering events as being positive or negative mechanisms for change. Of all of the triggers mentioned, 15 of them were described as being positive mechanisms for change and 3 were described as being negative. Four of the triggers were not identified as either positive or negative.



Overall, the triggers were viewed positively because of the significance and relevance they had to the circumstances of the participant's life. Joanne stated: "it rewarded and inspired me and increased my self confidence"... "it was thought provoking and gave me a better understanding of myself."

Gwen thought that "it gave me recognition at a cognitive level of what I was capable of" and that "it led to more reading and speaking about empowerment with other women and understanding of self." In contrast to her undergraduate experience, Gwen described her graduate studies as completely the opposite: "It was really fun, it really truly was. A lot of hard work but it was fun."

Willy recognized how she learned and that she didn't need to connect with another person's personality "in order to learn from them." For Jennifer, she noted that her incident "made sense for me out of my life." She also recognized that "teaching and learning took place and I got the tools to understand my life better as an individual and part of society."

Stephanie stated, "it made me find my place." She also discussed how different she found her experience from her previous undergraduate experience:

It is so different. You are producing and it is different, than just learning. And you are learning from other people but it is a far different relationship than that of any other school system...I remember thinking, "Gosh, I'm doing my master's" but I'm thinking, "They want to hear from me." It wasn't all one-way. It was a far, far different learning experience than an undergraduate program.... You are expected to produce now. They are waiting to learn from you.



Philip emphasized that “it was about bringing learning back to your own experience.” The three triggers described as being negative triggers were described as such because of the past circumstances of pain associated with them. Willy and Gwen thought of one trigger as negative because of the connection that was made to painful childhood memories. Brian had difficulty in describing the triggers as “absolutely positive or negative” depending at what point in the program they were being looked at, as this comment describes:

I think the triggers were, at the time that they occurred, sometimes very negative. They caused a lot of confusion and sometime a lot of angst. For sure at the particular moment, it was negative. I think now that as I look back that, actually, it was a very good thing. Because the angst was actually necessary for the way that I transformed my own world and looked at it. So those negative experiences that I first felt have actually become positive.

Brian’s comments suggested that the timing and circumstances surrounding the incident had affected how the incident itself was viewed.

### Summary of How the Incidents Were Experienced

The ways in which the critical incidents of transformative learning were experienced emerged from an inductive analysis of the data. The experiences fell into two categories: emotional and cognitive responses. The investigation of these experiences helped to extend and broaden the description of the critical incidents themselves.



Of the emotional responses, disorientation and anger were prevalent feelings. The disorientation was a result of past experiences being looked at with new knowledge. For some of the participants, the process of self-exploration had already begun prior to graduate school, and thus the disorientation was less profound. The emotion of anger also played a key-role in the process of self-exploration for many participants. However, for some it was less prevalent and only discernable in the expressed resentment. Once again, the degree of anger was connected to where the students were in the process of self-exploration.

Of the cognitive responses, the students made comparisons of themselves with other students and other circumstances in their lives. The comparison to other students was with respect to full-or part-time status of students and the reason that other students came to graduate school. These comparisons were seen as related to student motivation, focus, and future goals. Participants saw themselves differently from most other students in the graduate program and considered themselves more receptive to learning than other students. Comparisons were also made with the participant's circumstances of life. These circumstances included: comparisons to prior learning experiences, particularly at the undergraduate level; prior learning environments, particularly with regard to instructor feedback and skills development; and prior contexts of learning that had not been self-directed and learner centered. The emotional and cognitive responses occurred as a result of the participants undertaking self-exploration within a process of disintegration.



### **What Transformation Resulted?**

One of the greatest challenges to transformative learning theories is the question of what constitutes transformative learning or the evidence that it has taken place. Although the participants in this study had self-identified as having experienced transformative learning, the participants were all asked to give details and examples of what changes resulted from their critical incidents. This articulation provided supporting data that both internal and external transformations had taken place. These changes were described by the participants within two main categories, cognitive and affective change. However, it was also apparent that some participants experienced contextual life changes as well, which evidently were inspired by their transformative learning. The three themes of cognitive, affective, and contextual changes are presented in the next section.

#### Cognitive Changes

Three cognitive changes appeared to follow a linear and sequential process. The first one was a pattern of self-awareness that blossomed from earlier seeds of self-exploration that had been sown. Although the time of self-exploration did not always occur solely within the graduate program experience, the self-awareness described by each of the participants clearly emerged within it. The second was in the self-efficacy of the participants. The third cognitive change was the change in understanding expressed by most of the participants of the expectations of the master's program and the realization that they were now creators and not just persons of knowledge.



### Self-Awareness

Almost all of the participants had described themselves, when they started the program, as having been “open and receptive to learn” and having been “malleable.” This suggested that many of the participants had already started a process of self-exploration prior to graduate school, which was confirmed in many of the adult life critical incidents. Evidence that students became more self-aware was found throughout the data.

Joanne stated that she now had a better understanding of herself and her motivation. She also acknowledged that the “challenge and rewards involved in graduate study have led me to be more self-actualized than at any other point in my life.” Joanne also recognized different styles and stages of learning and recognized her own individuality and preference in learning:

I’ve realized I like a lot of information in my classes. It is my preference in learning with the different learning styles. I think I value different learning styles more. I see the value of including a lot of different teaching methods in class....I found that with others, students especially, that different people valued different courses and even different things within each of the courses. So, it reaffirmed to me the individuality of learning and how we all go through different stages in our learning, as well.

Gwen also understood why she “tends to do things” and recognized the value of her individuality and potential:



Furthermore, it has made me realize that I may think differently from my colleagues but that does not mean I am wrong. It means I am different. My point of view is now as important as the next person's. I have a confidence in my writing that I did not have before because I understand that it was my writing that convinced my advisor I could do a thesis...I still find it exciting to know this about myself. I feel like I just peeled off a few more layers of the onion and have gotten to know me deep down inside a little better.

Willy spoke about a greater sense of responsibility for her self, resulting from her experience.

You just have to take care of yourself and make your own happiness, or at least a spot where you can find peace by developing yourself into who you want to be. Responsibility for my self, then, is in part what developed within me with the M.Ed. I don't feel so insecure in my thinking either and I'm trying to avoid people and/or situations that I think are pointless and waste my time.

Jennifer also mentioned in several places that she began to understand her self and her life "in new ways." She spoke of how the changes have become manifest in her life and how she expects that to continue.

These events will always remain fundamental to my growing understanding of social relations and will continue to be a part of my professional as well as personal development.

Stephanie spoke a great deal about how the critical reflection incidents she described in her experience, resulted in an understanding of her true motivations for



going back to school, for identifying her own strengths and weaknesses, and, most of all, changing the way she saw herself and others:

I'm thinking, I've changed. I do not judge a person anymore. Like my kids would say, "Oh, well," and state an opinion and I'd say, "Yes, but...did you think...?" You don't give answers but you pose questions to the other person to make them think and if you don't pose questions, you don't think, then you are rigid, and you don't learn. That's the biggest change in me: how I relate to my life and to other people.

Aaron had difficulty in describing single critical incidents because for him it was more of a process of change. However, when he spoke of the results of his experience, he stated that:

In the worst case scenario, it is making me more cognizant of what transpires on [sic] me or helps me understand my own behaviour. In the more optimistic view, it helps me to conduct my life more meaningfully, which is ethically, morally, and in a productive way, hopefully.

Brian expressed self-awareness and his realization that he would never be the same person.

I became aware of my preferences for learning and was able to participate more fully in the process....I look at myself differently now. It is not just that I carry myself differently and people look at me differently. How these changes have manifested in my self is that I now see myself quite differently.... I've opened myself up to the power of possibility for myself to mutate. To actually mutate



into something that is still me and in some cases even more myself than I was before.

For Philip, he described his change as maximizing past learning in the following way: "It has increased my confidence in my own ability to really solidify the things that I learned as an undergraduate." He also spoke of other changes from within himself and from his new perspectives.

I learned many things about myself and these things help me to identify my strengths and weaknesses. Knowing where the potential problem areas lie is vital to success. I think the program has broken down many barriers that I had in my thinking and things from my childhood and from my environment.

Barriers that I had put up, and barriers that I have learned. It has kind of forced me to think outside of the barriers and exposed myself to situations that are new and don't fit within the paradigm that I had initially.

Roger felt "hard pressed" to state specifically how he had changed though he suspected that he had changed in "profound ways." He described more affective and contextual changes, but he stated that "I am all I think that I am, who I was, in the most profound way." This suggested that he may have previously gone through a period of self-exploration and understanding that made him self-aware.

A strong connection was apparent in the data between the opportunity for self-exploration and the increased self-awareness that emanated from the students. The permission and safe environment granted to the students for self-exploration was undertaken in conjunction with the presentation of new knowledge, ideas, and



perspectives. This occurred during a period of disintegration that proved to disorientate and even anger most of the participants as they struggled to achieve a heightened level of self-awareness. This was finally actualized in the process of reintegration with the introduction of new roles, skills, and learning contexts.

### Self-Efficacy

The data indicated that the participants' self-efficacy was another cognitive change that resulted from the successes they experienced in the graduate program. Not all of the participants spoke directly to this. However, a changed perception in self-efficacy was evident in all participants, as the following comments revealed.

Joanne's critical incident of receiving positive feedback from a professor on a paper she had written demonstrated a real change in her self-efficacy.

The enthusiasm and praise of this professor, on top of the other "success" I had had so far in the program, really made me feel as though I had finally found my niche. It gave me the feeling that I was really, good at what I was doing (researching, thinking, writing) and that I should continue with it as I seemed to excel at it.... Overall, I think receiving this feedback increased my confidence as a graduate student and as a person. I also think it encouraged me to continue to put forward my best effort in all my work.

Gwen used the term "empowerment" to describe what resulted from her critical incidents. "I was truly empowered through this one incident to believe in myself a little more." Her description of her most profound critical incident had to do with the



encouragement she received from her advisor when she outlined her project and her advisor told her that she really had a “thesis in the making.” Gwen recognized this incident as a turning point for her in her self-efficacy.

She encouraged me to go for the gold, so to speak, because I had it in me to do so. I began to cry. I could not stop myself. She asked me softly, “Why are you crying?” This was the first time a teacher had gotten through to me or perhaps had even tried to get through to me. It is the first time that I truly recognized that I had ability. The feeling was exultation. I now knew in my mind that I could do a thesis and could go on to do a Ph.D. if I chose to. From then on, there was no turning back. I would go through the thesis process. Each month, I felt stronger and more capable.

Although Willy did not directly connect her critical incidents to her self-efficacy, she described its importance in facilitating transformative learning.

I think that if you want to do something, or be someone who is transformed, you really have to take initiative. An idea or even a community of thought can be made or broken through one’s curiosity.... I think that if you aren’t assertive in your desire in whatever you seek, no one else will care, and others will assert their views on you. For transformative learning to occur, you really have to believe in yourself and in your own development, and that you are connected to something bigger than yourself, and that you can always be transformed by something in it.



Jennifer inferred an increased self-efficacy when she described the master's program as a discovery process involving passion, joy, and motivation for learning.

I think we all have enough talents that if we want to choose something, we can do that, but if your passion isn't a part of that, then the meaning will be very different for you too. The passion, and joy, and motivation in learning changes if it is not connected. The intensity of the work I found very deep in the master's program as you are putting yourself into it for yourself and not because of a teacher's expectation. It was wonderful to go through the whole discovery process.

Stephanie expressed her changed perception in self-efficacy when she described the process she went through in realizing what the master's program meant for her.

You are there to come up with your own ideas, to come up with your own thesis, to contribute to education or whatever master's work you are doing. To contribute to the field, that was an eyeopener for me and it is very good for your self-confidence. With self-confidence comes the feeling like [*sic*] you are being respected and with that feeling, you produce better. You have more to offer, you are more confident to say what you want to say. It makes you a better person to feel that you are competent and that somebody is listening to you.

Aaron spoke of making every writing assignment count by sending them out for publication. He inferred an increased self-efficacy from this personal objective of his.

I would imagine some of the writing I have done for the course, which I have duly sent out for publication, while writing those I had experienced quite a few



GINTOTs. I have adapted assignments for publication purposes because I refuse to do work, that sort of work, bringing that sort of expertise into the education program, where it is not valued for what it is. To do it, just for the sake of the course. My object is to get each final assignment published and that is what I aim for.

For Brian, one of his critical incidents was giving a paper overseas at an international conference. He described it as a process where he began research that led to a research assistantship. He then developed a proposal for funding that later was accepted, as he described in these words:

But for me the nature of the incident was extremely important because it was, to me, what I had become and I hadn't really noticed. I hadn't had it thrust upon me, so to speak, of how much I had changed through the process of doing the master's degree. When I was in front of these individuals who were all very well known in their field and published and Ph.D.'s and I presented my paper and it was accepted. It was a very interesting experience...I was accepted into this community of scholars. That was very, very rewarding...I was offered a Ph.D. spot in England and if I can get the money, then I'll go.

In describing the importance of recognizing critical incidents and their triggers in a graduate program, Philip spoke of his own improved perception of self-efficacy.

I think these events are important because they have increased my level of proficiency at the things I learned as an undergraduate. I now have a good



perspective on my chosen profession and on life. These events have led me to a position where I can sustain further learning and increase my value to the world.

Roger's comments reveal a similar process as he described an increase in self-efficacy from writing a paper and presenting it at a conference as his critical incident.

Publishing my first paper and attending a conference with my advisor and mentor who was the second author--heady stuff. I enjoyed the conference, the intellectual mingling with others, and the opportunity to have my own work critiqued and validated by peers and respected researchers and authors.

The students' perceptions of their own capabilities changed so much for the positive during their graduate experience that it became a new belief that each one possessed by the end of the program. The conflict that had previously engaged students during the disintegration phase seemed to be quieted by the repeated affirmation they received within the program for the reintegration of their new skills, roles, and learning contexts.

Student acknowledgement was not only perceived through direct praise but through more, discreet measures as well. Some of these included invitations for students to participate in academic ventures, an expression of serious interest in a student's research, or acceptance into new circles of socialization. These signs of validation facilitated students to break away from old thought patterns, former relationships, and past roles that previously were identified as life difficulties or anxieties by the participants.



A reintegration process was evident as students took on new roles, such as research and teacher assistantships; took on new challenges, such as writing and delivering academic papers; and took on new responsibilities, such as self-directed learning. The reintegration process of the participants was fostered in an academic environment that participants described as having provided opportunities for these new roles, encouraged the development of new tasks and learning contexts, and facilitated changes in student academic pursuits. The participants' responses strongly suggested that adult educators who demonstrated seasoned guidance and empathy played a pivotal role in facilitating a change in self-efficacy and self-worth that had previously handicapped students.

#### Expectations and Realization of Becoming a "Master"

An interesting finding was that most of the participants did not really understand what the master's program was about when they started the program. They had thought, for the most part, that it was just more learning, something that they should do as the next logical step in their education.

Joanne found it exciting when she realized she was "actually becoming an expert at something." Gwen thought she probably should have had counseling at the beginning because she did not know what it meant to be a Master of Education until she completed her thesis. Then it clicked.

I probably needed to go and have somebody counsel me at the very beginning of what it means to be a Master of Education. Because I really didn't get it. It



was after I was finished that I said, "Wow, this is really special, this is really something to have this degree, isn't it?"

Willy stated that she wondered if this was really what it was all about: "I thought there was more....and there can be more, and there can be great thinking but there is also the knowledge that this all depends on you and how much you want to push yourself."

Jennifer said that she didn't have any expectations going into the program.

I only knew I was terrified about going back and doing my master's degree. I didn't know until later the specific requirements of a thesis and research, etc. So as far as expectations, they weren't at all clear. I just knew I had to do this.

Jennifer considered her self "lucky" to get into the education program because she saw it as a "logical and interesting umbrella under which to coalesce my varied interests" but really didn't know what she was in for. She felt that she was malleable coming into the program, and that it was going to be the "biggest treat of my life."

Stephanie mentioned in numerous places how little she understood about the master's program going in. She stated:

You have to focus on what you intend to produce. And little did I realize that you were expected to produce. I did not realize that going into the master's program. I just thought it was more intense learning.



Aaron expressed a lot of concern about the expectations of the master's program. He thought it wasn't sufficiently challenging for the uninitiated and required far less work than what was expected in many undergraduate programs.

I even complained with some of the faculty with whom I have taken courses:

"You know the number of readings that you have given is so little. We did more reading at the undergraduate level for a course and you are giving this and people are not even coming prepared for that?" And we are preparing to be masters? It is a joke.

Brian, as well, stated that he did not know what the master's program was all about.

I was caught up in the academic stuff in the master's program, caught up in the image. Images of people who went into master's programs for me at the time, I held in very great esteem because they were people who went on to advanced studies. They were very special people, they were people who were intellectual, and they were people I wanted to be, basically. I would picture myself in that situation. The image of the master's program was one that involved intensive study, people who were very interested in learning and pursuing that.

Philip said that he "didn't know what it was all about" but said, "I knew it was where I wanted to go. It was the next step in my education. I knew that... I was excited to go into it." Roger did not speak directly about his expectations in entering the master's program. However, he did state, "I don't think my attitudes or beliefs about teaching and learning before I entered the M.Ed. program were very deep."



The data did not reveal a consistent pattern of expectations in the master's program for all participants. Aaron and Willy, for example, both expressed considerable disappointment because of what they had expected in a master's-level program. Although the remaining participants had not known what to expect when they started the program, they saw the Master of Education program as the next logical step in their education and a place they felt "at home." They came to the understanding towards the end of the program that they had now entered the realm of being "creators of knowledge" and not just "persons of knowledge." This appeared to be closely linked with their improved self-efficacy perception described earlier.

#### Summary of Cognitive Changes

The cognitive changes followed a linear process that started with the self-awareness of each of the participants followed by a notable pattern of improved self-efficacy and finally with the realization that they had become creators of knowledge. These cognitive changes led to reintegration and occurred simultaneously with affective changes, which are presented in the next section.

The change in self-awareness had followed a phase of disintegration involving self-exploration, whereby past experiences were brought to conclusion or harmonized with new knowledge, ideas, and perspectives. As participants reflected on their own past, they discovered why they thought a certain way and often recognized the cause of their anxiety or life difficulty. As they became exposed to other points of view, they made comparisons with other students and other circumstances, which formed a



connectedness that had previously been missing in their lives. The participants' past environment of isolation, separation, or abandonment was replaced with a new environment of respect, trust, and confidentiality in the process of disintegration. Feelings of disorientation and anger were replaced with joy and excitement as the students moved into the stage of reintegration.

Although most of the participants had described insecurities about their capabilities at the time of entering the graduate program, this changed considerably. It was evident from the data that many of the critical incidents described while in the program resulted in increased self-efficacy. For most of the participants, the cognitive changes in self-efficacy were described in association with feelings of "enjoyment" and "exultation." The participants described their resulting feelings from the cognitive changes as a sequence that started with first having been recognized; second, connected; and third, validated. These feelings appear to have been sustained throughout the program in an environment that was predominantly described by participants as one of acceptance, validation, and respect.

The final cognitive change in the linear process was the realization that the students had become creators of knowledge and not just persons of knowledge. This prompted a period of reevaluation of what their learning was for and required the reconciliation of new meaning perspectives with personal beliefs and goals. Evidence for this was apparent in the numerous statements in the data where the participants aligned their personal goals and beliefs to their new cognitive understanding. Although more individualistic cognitive changes were evident in the data, the changes in self-



awareness, self-efficacy, and in expectations of becoming active creators of knowledge in the master's program emerged as consistent and highly relevant themes to all participants.

### Affective Changes

Almost all of the participants showed evidence of affective changes in three similar ways: (1) internal locus of control, (2) tolerance for other perspectives and ideas, and (3) satisfaction with inward rewards, such as increased self-esteem and self-confidence. The locus of control for the participants emerged inferentially from the data. The other two changes were all self-identified by the participants, who spoke of their affective changes as having made them better people.

### Internal Locus of Control

The data suggested that the participants had a high internal locus of control. People with this character trait believe that what happens to them largely depends on themselves and not on external circumstances (Greenberg, Baron, Sales, & Owen, 1996). When I asked the participants where they went for support while in the graduate program, the data consistently revealed a high reliance on self, suggestive of a high internal locus of control. Whether or not this characteristic was present before the program is unclear. However, it is a strikingly consistent character trait in all participants.



Joanne was matter-of-fact with her answer: "Nowhere, just myself." Gwen stated that she "didn't go to anyone initially," but later did find a previously graduated female student who helped to peer-mentor her. Willy said that she would go to "anyone who would listen" but in the end, "I don't stop until I come to some settlement in my head." Stephanie stated "women with children at home, especially single moms, rely on support from their children." However, because her girls were teenagers, she stated, "really, I was on my own." Philip's comments were consistent with the loneliness he described throughout his data: "I've always relied on myself," and Brian's comments suggested his safe haven: "I retreat to myself."

Some of these comments suggest that the participants were self-reliant people before they began the program. It seemed likely, however, that as students embarked on a process of self-exploration and became aware of the difficulties in their life, they also realized the need for personal commitment and personal responsibility to change.

### Tolerance and Acceptance of Other Perspectives

A resulting affective change consistently referred to by all of the participants was an increased tolerance and acceptance of other perspectives. As these students became more self-aware and discerning of the factors that had brought them to this point in their lives, they demonstrated a greater understanding of how other perspectives could be reached. This resulted in an increased tolerance and acceptance of other perspectives, which the participants valued in relation to their learning and their personal lives. Data suggested that participants conducted their own lives "more



meaningfully,” which they included to mean “ethically, morally, and in a productive way” because of seeing other perspectives.

Joanne spoke of this in relation to other students in the program and the variation of courses and activities.

I found that, with other students especially, different people valued different courses and even different things within each of the courses. So it reaffirmed to me the individuality of learning and how we all go through different stages in our learning, as well.

Gwen and Jennifer both spoke about how they valued the input from peers within the graduate program and how learning was facilitated and enriched by the sharing of the lifelong experiences through class discussions. Gwen valued instructors who gave “the impression that you are all here to learn something and that I’m not the expert who has to know everything.”

Stephanie referred to her increased tolerance of others in different ways. She said,

I honestly feel that education just changes your whole perspective on the way you view the world. You can learn very much from another person, if you consider their perspective and take away the labels we tend to put on people.

Aaron said he had changed for the better because now he would describe himself as liberated and his life enriched. “Being more receptive to other streams of studies, viewpoints, and appreciative as to what they have to offer because before I missed out on the vast array of what else was all around it.” Aaron felt an intense



connection of his new knowledge and perspective to the very core of his life, as this comment suggested:

Some of the things that I have learned in the past that I have learned through schooling, etc., apply into a very small known domain of what I do. That does not define me as a person. Some of the things that I have learned in education apply almost directly to how I conduct my life.

Brian considered openness to other perspectives as being an important component of allowing change to occur in himself. He said, "I believe that the important thing is to be open to many different ideas and to allow yourself to change throughout your own experiences with these ideas."

Philip spoke of how he now detached himself emotionally from many aspects of a situation and could see relative issues better.

It is been my experience that people are often intimidated by the way people present their information or knowledge to others. I have learned how to take what people give me and put it into perspective...I have an ability now to view situations in a relative sense.

Philip made a strong connection between his experience of breaking down barriers in his thinking and developing more tolerance for others:

I think the program has broken down a lot of barriers that I had in my thinking and things from my childhood and from my environment. It is a whole bunch of things like social norms and things that you grow up with. Just the family you happen to be born into. They have certain stigmas, and barriers and concepts



that only apply to those people and that community. As my university experience exposed me to situations, I had to deal with people and meet people that were outside of that culture and that lifestyle. It forces you to think about the implications of what your beliefs are. And whether it be religious beliefs, or social beliefs, or economic, whatever, it forces you to confront the reality of the world, rather than being in that isolated community where people spend time together and that's all they do together.

Roger also saw himself as more tolerant and open to other ideas. His comments include comparisons to past experiences. He stated:

I am more tolerant of other ideas and more flexible in my approaches to teaching. There is no one way to get to learning, anymore. At one time, I think that I thought there was.

The participants all voiced greater openmindedness and increased tolerance for other people's viewpoints. This occurred in conjunction with their own journey of self-awareness, which made them cognizant of how their thinking was formed and perpetuated.

### Internal Rewards

As the students proceeded through the reintegration phase and as their confidence and self-esteem improved, they became motivated more by internal rewards than by external rewards. Although high grades and praise had been stated as important factors initially motivating the students, these external endorsements were not valued as



highly towards the end of the program. Internal rewards such as self-actualization, inner peace, balance, empowerment, and self-discipline were more highly esteemed. Many of the participants spoke of these things as something they would take with them the rest of their lives.

For Joanne, self-actualization was an exhilarating feeling, unlike anything she had experienced before.

I also acknowledge that the challenges and rewards involved in graduate study have led me to be more self-actualized than at any other point in my life. I identify my time at Brock as the “best year of my life” so far. I hope to be able to balance my beliefs and my desire to be constantly challenged in my professional life.

Gwen’s internal reward focused on empowerment, not only for herself but for how she could help others, women in particular, to attain it. She saw it as freeing “a person to learn, to explore, and to grow” and as something that would stay with her for her lifetime.

Empowerment for the individual is a metamorphosis. I compare it to the ugly little caterpillar that wriggles out of its safe cocoon; only to learn that he/she is a beautiful butterfly with wings that can carry him/her to pinnacles that the ugly brown caterpillar could merely dream about. The same can happen to the empowered person. If we keep wriggling out of the old familiar “skin” we can find ourselves in places we only dreamed about, doing things we did not know we were capable of doing. For example, I published an article in the Brock



Journal of Education just before I graduated. I had only dreamed that I could accomplish such a feat but once I started wriggling, I just had to fly!

Inner peace and happiness were important internal rewards that Willy cited, “You just have to take care of yourself and make your own happiness, or at least a spot where you can find peace by developing yourself into who you want to be.” She also noted that self-preservation and commitment to develop her personality were important goals in her life now:

Generally, I try to avoid situations that in the past I may have confronted because I feel there is little I can do about it and it is wasting my energy. I try to direct my energy into my own self-preservation and commitment to develop my personality.

Reflection was expressed by Jennifer as something she valued in order to keep the various components of her life interconnected and in balance. She wanted to continue using reflection as a way to enhance her learning and happiness.

I’m starting to think that I need to start a journal to hold all my notes of everything. It is not just my separate diary for myself or what I need to do for my schoolwork, or the kids but everything. All as one because these are all parts of my one same life. And I shouldn’t try to artificially separate them because the thought about one will inform the other...there is this happiness with one adding to the other in ways that would not be there otherwise.

Stephanie learned the value of “letting go,” which she deemed an important



prerequisite to learning for her.

I have learned how to let go. That is very hard to do when you are an only child.

When you are stubborn, you don't let go. You totally hold on to your opinions.

You are right. It taught me, what's the use of hanging on? It is a control issue; you have to learn to let go. When you let go, you learn. If you are tight and rigid, nothing is going to penetrate.

Aaron's data repeatedly indicated that he valued that his life was liberated and enriched through his graduate experience.

To understand that people do things the best that they can do at the time, in the situation and circumstances that are given to them. This allows me to be more tolerant later because it so happens that they don't jive from my perception. So, in that regard, it was very liberating for me in one sense and in another sense, it is very confining but it is definitely enriching and I think that is the crux of the matter.

Brian spoke of how he valued reconciling his new knowledge with his beliefs and how he enjoyed the discovery and process of learning.

I was exposed to an environment where my personal beliefs became part of the educative process. I was encouraged to experience my own learning rather than focus on the ends. I also discovered that it was not just about means. In short, I became aware that learning for me could not be described by a simple dichotomy of means and ends.



Philip discussed how he valued the external rewards from his martial arts and how that eventually changed to more internal rewards such as “learning how to discipline your body to actually achieve different goals in life.” Philip described satisfaction as an important reward.

It was a very positive experience. I look back at people who are where I was and say “how can you be satisfied to live in a situation?” It’s almost like people don’t want to learn or don’t want to address the specific issues. It was very difficult for me and I can understand how people can stay in that situation. It is just a very positive thing for me.

In Roger’s data, he recognized the joy that learning has brought about for him and looked forward to the continuation of this.

The little GINTOTs that I mention were and are something that I have come to expect in most of my work and life now. Perhaps that is my greatest insight, that I don’t know it all and that there will always be a series of AHAs happening in both my professional and personal life.

All of the internal rewards mentioned by participants involved in some regard a commitment to lifelong learning, to sustained self-growth and inner happiness, and to somehow making a positive contribution to a larger social circle.



### Summary of Affective Changes

Like the cognitive changes, the affective changes followed a linear sequential process. However, both cognitive and affective changes were happening simultaneously, informing and responding to one another. The affective changes took place during a period of reintegration. As participants became more cognizant of their own lives through reflection and new knowledge, they correspondingly took greater personal responsibility for changing, as they learned to view their life's difficulties as an opportunity for self-growth.

Once participants committed to change in themselves, they underwent a period of feeling recognized by, connected with, and vindicated by their peers and educators. This resulted in the participants feeling more open to other people's perspective and more tolerant of different viewpoints.

As students succeeded in new tasks, new roles, and new learning contexts, they started to view themselves differently. Prevalent past feelings of insecurity and life anxiety were changed because of increased self-confidence and self-worth. This resulted in a new cognitive awareness of self-efficacy. As students experienced increased self-efficacy and self-confidence levels, deep-seated beliefs changed as well. This had a fundamental impact on the previous dependency on external rewards and caused participants to value more intrinsic rewards. Some of the compensations deemed consequential were self-discipline, peace, balance, inner happiness, joy of learning, and empowerment. In general, participants felt that their lives were more



meaningful than they had been and that they were more ethically and morally productive.

### Contextual Changes

A number of contextual changes were also evident in the data and were often cited by the participants as the most blatant and visible external evidence of the participant's transformative learning experience. These primarily related to changes in employment, marital status, and education.

### Employment Change

Several of the participants in this study left active employment in order to go into graduate school. For most of them, a master's degree was sought to increase their employment options, financial remuneration, and/or their future career goals. Regardless of why the participants changed their employment positions, all of them interrupted a prior work experience in order to go back to school. Three participants showed a change in their work choice, because of their transformative learning experience.

Willy went on to teach in another international teaching contract immediately following completion of her graduate degree. During the course of the questionnaire and interview, however, she expressed a lot of discontent with this career choice.



I see that I've been granted certain permission within this M.Ed. to work in implementing and perpetuating the system, but I don't believe in what I'm doing. In the beginning, I went in wanting to be initiated, but now that I'm initiated, I don't want to belong.

After the data were collected for this study, Willy resigned from her position in the International school. She had applied to a Ph.D. program at a Canadian university.

Philip's learning experience brought about increased employment opportunities.

I really noticed a big difference now. Before when I went to university, I was having a hard time. There was no employment, and there was no opportunity and the external things were controlling me. But now, coming out of the master's program, I've had lots of job opportunities I can achieve and I can design my career the way I want it to go and I can decide because of what I've got. I was just offered a job and I was offered two more positions, as soon as I took it.

For Philip, his education was about building himself internally, becoming in better shape to be in control of his life. He stated that he "did not want to live my life like the person who is a 50-year-old factory worker and gets laid off and doesn't know what to do...they have nothing ... their life is over." Although he was working full-time while completing his thesis at the time of this study, he was able to find work related to his research that he totally enjoyed.

I'm in a situation now where [someone] has brought me into a group of people where they are the top people in their field but they are working together. There



are about four or five people working together and [someone] is bringing me into the group, almost as another participant. Things that I'm interested in are related to what they do but they are not exactly what they do. And so now, they offered me a Ph.D. position. I think I'm eventually going to pursue it.

Philip was particularly excited about working in an area where he could continue to conduct ongoing research.

Roger had intentionally gone into the master's program as a means of professional development. Instead, he found it changed his career path.

[I] found it was an opportunity to change careers laterally rather than dramatically. I enjoyed the transformation from a "trainer" to an educator. From merely teaching about something like statistics, to helping others learn through a greater understanding of the processes of teaching and learning.

### Marital Status Change

Many of the participants spoke about changes in familial relationships, friendships, and social circles due to their transformative learning. In all of the examples, none was as traumatic or described with as much pain as changes in the marital relationship. Both Jennifer and Stephanie literally experienced separation and suffered a tremendous sense of abandonment as financial and sole child care responsibilities were put upon them. Despite these responsibilities, both women felt a sense of gladness that the conflict that previously distressed them was no longer present.



Jennifer's marriage resulted in a separation while in graduate school. She cited lack of support as one of the reasons but saw the problems as having existed prior to graduate school and coming to a head at that time. She referred to a history of abuse in her life for the past 10 years but did not provide details of this or state that it was from her husband.

Like Jennifer, Stephanie had a history of abuse but her abuse was clearly stated as emanating from her alcoholic husband. She described her angst about being a single mom and struggled with leaving her husband for a long time. After her graduation from the master's program, she felt the time was finally right and she was strong enough to leave him. This ultimately culminated in a permanent separation as well.

It was his alcoholism, so we are apart now. It took me a long time, all this time, to leave him. It was never the right moment. For me it was never the right moment to leave because I have papers to do, I can't be in an uproar right now, I have this due and that due. I think I avoided dealing with it and immersing myself in school.

This last comment provided an example from one participant of how academic pursuits provided a substitution and a place to retreat from distressing life issues.

### Educational Change

Many of the participants either went onto further doctoral studies, had applied to doctoral studies, or anticipated applying in the near future. Roger, Jennifer, and Gwen were all past graduates of the master's program and all went to further studies.



Roger and Jennifer were both pursuing their Ph.D. at the time of this study. Gwen went on to a training program at a different university. She was still considering doctoral studies for the future. Stephanie had plans to pursue her doctoral studies in the near future as well.

Joanne and Brian both applied to doctoral programs but had not anticipated that they would when they started their master's program. Joanne had applied to a number of doctoral programs, which she identified as examples of how she has changed over the past year.

Before beginning my master's, I had a dream of living out of the city, having a family, being self-sustaining with a garden, solar power, etc. I wanted a career that would support this dream and that would help others and the state of the environment. I now feel myself moving down a different path, because of the enjoyment and successes I experienced in my master's studies. I worry that ...[this] is moving me in a direction that compromises some of my beliefs. I also acknowledge that the challenge and rewards involved in graduate study have led me to be more self-actualized than at any other point in my life.... My academic success in my master's degree, and my enjoyment of doing these things that I seem to be good at, has led me to decide to pursue doctoral studies.

Brian was offered a Ph.D. position overseas resulting from presenting a paper at an international conference with his advisor last year. He had also applied to other Ph.D. programs in Canada.



The commitment to further education and continued research were the most common of all the contextual changes described. The change to further studies in education would consequently lead to changes in future work and likely strongly further influence ongoing changes in social structures and relationships.

### Summary of Contextual Changes

Contextual change is seen as an inevitable occurrence in adult life, especially in this day and age. Although the changes discussed in this section appear as common happenings for many adults, this study singled them out because of their connection with the transformative learning experience that influenced them. It also singled them out because of the relative importance put on them by the individual participants. Clearly, the context of the participants' lives played an enormous part, not only on the learning process, but also on the nature and direction of the contextual changes.

Many of the contextual changes were not conceived of by the participants prior to graduate school, such as further education in doctoral studies. However, these are not surprising given the positive experience most participants enjoyed in their master's-level studies. Many of the participants went into the program with one objective and came out with something very different, such as those who returned to school for professional career development and decided to change careers instead. Some of the changes were already conceived of prior to graduate school but the participants did not have sufficient resolve or feel the timing was right until graduate school, such as occurred with the marital breakups. Importantly, not all change was predictable and



students seemed open to different options and a variety of choices for their future aspirations.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

The participants did not live or learn in a vacuum but were influenced and molded by their stage of life, personal experiences, familial and cultural conditioning, and even historical events. The data revealed many clear indications that learning was situated within and tremendously influenced by personal, social, and historical factors.

Piecing together the critical incident data from all of the participants, without consideration of the period in which it took place, revealed that all participants came into the graduate program with prior life issues that caused them anxiety. The life difficulty was not the same for all, although there were clear patterns of similarity. Some of the similarities were emotional anxieties stemming from childhood; physical handicaps from ill health or physical impairments; personal distress from marital problems; social barriers from familial or cultural conditioning; limitations from prior work, learning, or travel experiences; and even occupational challenges. Each of the participants identified something that obstructed them, a life difficulty that challenged the participants in some way.

The nature of the anxiety resulted in feelings of isolation, separation, or abandonment, and these feelings were evident in all participants' data. Most of the participants had reached a new level of cognitive and affective learning that was encouraged and supported in graduate school. This level of learning provided the opportunity for participants to self-explore whereby they were able to identify their life



difficulty and to understand the nature of it. This recognition was closely associated with communication and validation from instructors and from peers. Participants were able to view their personal difficulty in a different way, thereby changing their perspective. Their ability to achieve these levels of learning in the face of fragile, sensitive issues in their lives indicate that they perceived the learning environment to be safe and to afford them permission to move into new territory. The graduate students also expressed eagerness and satisfaction within the technical and practical domains of learning in their graduate school experience. However, the critical incidents that occurred during graduate school, whether described as a singular incident or as a process, allowed for a changed meaning perspective. Past life experiences were integrated and processed with new knowledge. The new meaning perspective was eventually reconciled with personal beliefs. Participants identified these incidents as significant milestones in their transformative learning experience and considered them liberating. This liberation unfolded through a process of disintegration and reintegration that flowed through the transformative learning experiences of each one of the participants.

An overview of the interpretation of the findings is presented in Table 4. Regardless of which critical incidents were explored, all of the participants experienced a similar process of disintegration in their life that involved emotional responses of feeling disorientated and angry. These affective responses to life difficulties often related back to incidents from the participants' childhood and adult life, prior to graduate school, which were a source of anxiety to the participants in some way. The



incidents resulted in creating an environment of isolation, separation, or abandonment. A process of disintegration took place as new knowledge, ideas, and new perspectives were processed through these prior feelings and participants were able to identify and understand their life difficulty in a new environment. This was an environment where acceptance, permission, and safety provided positive conditions for self-exploration. The process of self-exploration involved recognition, communication, and validation within the context of relationship building where encouragement, support, and feedback were instrumental in participants becoming self-aware and exhibiting a high internal locus of control. Participants described this environment as one of respect, trust, and confidentiality.

The process of disintegration was followed by a reintegration phase. This was an environment of discovery that allowed new perspectives to be formulated. This often involved analytical comparisons of the participants with other students in the program and/or with other circumstances of their lives. Participants described feelings of joy and excitement during this phase of the process. These feelings often related to confidence building and piecing together of their lives. Responsibility and commitment to personal change on the part of the participants facilitated the process as well. It is important to highlight here how embedded all of these conditions were and how one often set off the other conditions. The starting point was not always the same for all participants, but all participants did identify the same conditions and patterns of change.

For most of the participants, the starting point for the process of disintegration was identified as having begun already in the critical incidents described in the



participant's adult life, prior to entering the graduate program. However, graduate school was considered the safe environment where the majority of the disintegration had occurred, and for most of the participants, where the process of reintegration was cultivated. There were, however, exceptions to this. One clear example seemed to be Aaron, as it appeared that his disintegration phase was fully completed prior to entering graduate school. This seemed due to his coming to terms with the diagnosis of his illness. Jennifer also seemed to be an exception, in the way she described her "mental rape" incident. Interestingly, both Aaron and Jennifer described themselves as being "totally shattered" by their adult life incidents. Although Willy did not use the same terminology as Aaron and Jennifer, her childhood experience of being abducted had the same deeply rooted devastation as the other two. Their earlier experiences of disintegration may also provide an explanation for their inability to pinpoint a singular critical incident while in the graduate program. Instead, they described it as a process.

The interpretation of the participants' experiences was not only self-identified as transformative learning but was substantiated with visible internal and outward signs that verified change. The incidents resulted in a number of cognitive, affective, and contextual changes for all of the participants. The cognitive changes were evidenced in the participants' self-awareness, self-efficacy, and realization of what it meant to have a Master of Education degree. Affective changes were also apparent and included internal locus of control, tolerance and acceptance of other perspectives, and internal rewards.



It is important to understand that contextual changes were highly influenced by the transformative learning experience. This suggests far-reaching implications that adult education can bring about. Although people tend to welcome change, it can bring about considerable disturbances in an individual's life, it can cause a great deal of emotional distress, and it rarely affects only a single life. All of this was evident in the change experienced by most of the participants.

Although risk was associated with change, participants in this study were willing to take that risk. At the completion stage, the participants unanimously considered their transformative learning experience to have changed them personally for the good and to have improved their contextual situation by making it congruent with their personal beliefs, goals, and new meaning perspectives. Participants described themselves as creators of knowledge and self-actualized, and they demonstrated self-discipline. They voiced feelings of happiness and empowerment because of their transformative learning environment and showed signs of personal and social responsibility and commitment that they viewed as being ethically and morally more productive than in the past.



**NOTE:** This page [154] is blank due to misnumbering of pages. There is no text missing; the text on p. 153 continues on page 155.



## Overview of the Findings

Stage of process	What were the feelings?	What was happening?	What was the environment?	What resulted?	What resulted?	What resulted?
				Affective	Cognitive	Contextual
Life difficulty	Anxiety	Self-Doubt	Separation	Motivation	New knowledge	Graduate school :
	Distress	Insecurity	Isolation	Predisposition to change	New ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acceptance,</li> <li>Permission</li> <li>Safe environment</li> </ul>
		Something is missing	Abandonment		New perspectives	
Disintegration	Disorientation	Self-exploration:	Respect,	Internal locus of control:	Risk	Relationship building:
	Anger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognition</li> </ul>	Trust	Responsibility	Self-awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encouragement</li> <li>Support</li> <li>Feedback</li> </ul>
	Sensitivities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication</li> </ul>	Confidentiality	Commitment		
	Vulnerability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Validation</li> </ul>				
		Grieving				
Re-integration	Joy	Self-growth	Discovery	New perspective	Self-Efficacy	New Roles
	Excitement	Confidence building	Comparison to other students	Tolerance & acceptance of others	Realization of becoming a	Responsibilities
		Piecing back together	and other circumstances	Internal rewards:	"Master of Education"	Learning contexts
				Self esteem & self confidence		
Completion of Cycle	Empowerment	Self-actualization	Transformative learning	Personal and social responsibility	Reconciliation of	Changes: Employment,
	Happiness	Self-discipline		& commitment :	beliefs & goals	Marital
		Creating knowledge		Ethically & morally productive	Inner peace	status & Educational
					Balance	pursuits



## **CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter provides a synthesis of my exploration of the events that engaged graduate students in transformative learning. The synthesis begins with a summary of how this study has informed my understanding of transformative learning through the use of critical incidents deemed significant to the participating graduate students in a Master of Education program at a Canadian university. A discussion follows highlighting areas of interesting and contradictory findings to major areas considered in the literature review of chapter 2. The discussion is primarily concerned with how this study can inform the field of adult education about facilitating transformative learning with the use of the model developed from this study. Implications for theory, practice, and further research are outlined using the table, and possible ramifications, suggestions, and guidelines are considered in view of future research. The chapter concludes with personal reflections about this exploration.

### **Summary**

This study was undertaken to explore the events that engaged graduate students in transformative learning. Transformative learning falls within the domain of knowledge known as emancipatory knowledge because it allows for a level of cognitive understanding that is seen as liberating. Although different definitions exist for transformative learning, this study defined it as “the development of revised



assumptions, premises, ways of interpreting experience, or perspectives on the world by means of critical self-reflection” (Cranton, 1994b, p. xii ).

This study used phenomenological qualitative research to explore the events that engaged nine graduate students in transformative learning. A constructivist approach resulted in the design of a critical incident questionnaire to elicit descriptive and analytical answers from participants concerning their transformative learning experience. An interview with each participant provided rich data from the answers to metacognitive, reconstructive, and evaluative questions. All of the research questions evolved over time and were pilot tested twice. Changes to the initial designs were strongly influenced by Taylor’s (1998) critical review of the theoretical and empirical literature on transformative learning. Since contextual factors, universal models of adult learning, and stages of adult development were emphasized as being important in the literature, a number of questions were incorporated that spoke to these issues.

A model of transformative learning within individual life and learning contexts was developed that situated the graduate student within a micro-environment of their own individual, familial, cultural, and socio/political environments (see Figure 2). This model was then situated within a macro-environment involving broader demographic, historic, economic, and socio/political elements and finally situated within the life cycles of adult development. Three domains of learning: technical, practical, and emancipatory learning, identified by Habermas (1971), rooted the learning context of transformative learning within the emancipatory domain of learning.



Next, a conceptual model of transformative learning was developed to clarify the boundaries and limitations of this study (see Figure 3). Self-identified graduate students who had experienced transformative learning within a Master of Education program provided the necessary inputs for the study; that is, they were rational, articulate, self-aware, and self-reflective. The identified outcomes from perspective transformation were cognitive and affective change, with a view toward whether they would be manifest in personal and/or social changes. These outcomes were self-identified and were retrospective, taken directly from the results of the vividly remembered critical incidents described by the participants. Triggering events, both positive and negative, were also considered, as well as how the incidents were experienced, to provide a greater understanding of the experience. Since this was an exploratory study, the design and analysis purposely did not set out to examine previously identified processes for transformative learning in the literature. Analysis of the data followed the constant comparative method and involved both inductive and deductive analysis for themes and patterns and finally a synthesis of both forms of analysis.

The findings of the inductive analysis related to three main questions. The first question (what were the critical incidents) revealed three themes, which related to time, people, and circumstance. From the second question (how were they experienced) two responses were evident, emotional and cognitive responses. In the final question (what transformation resulted) cognitive, affective, and contextual changes emerged as a pattern. A final blending of the two categories of inductive and deductive analysis



together of their lives took place. This occurred in an environment of discovery involving comparison with other students and other circumstances. It was also evident that reconciliation had to be made of new perspectives with personal beliefs and goals for transformative learning to reach the completion stage. Participants expressed a new sense of personal and social responsibility that left them feeling empowered and happy. Contextual changes also resulted from the transformative learning experience of the participants. These changes were evident in the participants' employment, marital status, and academic pursuits.

### **Discussion**

The data provided ample evidence that all of the graduate students had been engaged in the emancipatory domain of learning. It appeared that this level of learning was a new experience for all but two of the students. This was evident in the passion and sense of liberation with which most of the participants spoke about their learning experience. A point that needs to be restated here is that transformative learning is just one type of learning. It is not meant to replace or discredit other types of learning, such as may be found within the technical or practical domains of learning. In fact, it appeared from this study that transformative learning was imbedded in these other forms of learning and enriched them. Transformative learning should not be considered a threat to other learning nor should it be considered a mandatory experience that can be forced on all individuals. Rather, it should be viewed as a process of maturation in higher order cognitive and affective development involving but not limited to critical thinking, reflection, and emotions.



The four stages identified in Table 4 can be considered the four cornerstones or building blocks of the foundation in the transformative learning model from this study. They involved the stages of life difficulty, disintegration, reintegration, and completion. The critical incidents from all of the participants' data provided the mortar for these foundational blocks. However, cornerstones and mortar by themselves do not build a foundation. It requires several other additional components such as: the right ingredients to produce a cementitious mixture, correctly engineered reinforcing material, adequate forming materials, skilled labourers, proper environmental conditions, and time for curing. In other words, it requires a process. Understanding how the critical incidents were experienced within the stages of the process shed considerable light on these other components of the foundation, in particular, what participants were feeling, what was happening at the time, and what type of environment there was. Like any building foundation, the individual components vary depending on what is to be built on it, where it is to be erected, who is doing the construction, and when it is being done. Given the unique individuality and circumstances of each adult learner in this study, it is important to view this model for transformative learning as a process that can be used as a guide. Although the conditions in the process can be replicated, the model is not intended to be used as a "blueprint" that provides exacting specifications.

An analysis of many existing transformative learning models suggested that transformative learning had not been viewed from this process mode. As of yet, no study was found that sought to explore and to understand the big picture or the larger



life issues, which often span a lifetime and that involve the individual's context of life and environment, while at the same time incorporating affective, cognitive, and contextual changes that may be happening. This study contributes to that bigger picture and thus provides one suggested foundational model from which transformative learning can be built. This model can facilitate identification of a student's learning situation and larger life issues. It can serve as a benchmark or means of identification for adult educators in determining which strategies for teaching would best serve the educational needs and goals of their students.

Although the model is different from existing models of transformative learning, it is, however, inclusive of a number of other models. This is because it identifies a number of changes, without suggesting a preconceived order in which those changes took place. In fact, the findings from this study are important because they demonstrated that change in any one of the areas--affective, cognitive, or contextual change, can set in motion changes in the other areas, given the appropriate conditions. This finding appeared to be consistent with a variety of transformative learning studies that have used different contextual situations, which involved life difficulty or anxiety as starting points for research. Courtenay, Merriam, and Reeves (1996, 1997) for example, looked at how a catalytic experience of being diagnosed as HIV positive, would set in motion a three-phase process of reflection and activity that led to transformative learning in the participants. First and Way (1995) found that transformative learning was the nature of the learning outcome for participants who experienced parenting difficulties with their children and who had enrolled in a



parenting course. Job loss was another context that was explored in view of its transformative learning potential. In this case, Laswell (1994) sought to gain insights into the ways in which adults learn when confronted with change in the workplace. These examples from the literature are very exciting in light of this study because they support the notion that it is possible for individuals to reframe negative elements when placed in context of the overall transformative learning process.

The critical incidents, described earlier as the mortar for foundation blocks, illustrated that each individual life and learning context was intricately being pushed, pulled, and shaped by any number of factors well outside of the scope, time, and influences of a graduate program. Participants came into the graduate program with background experiences that caused anxiety and distress, which originated from different sources, and which were not all described to the same degree. However, the anxiety and distress provided motivation for all participants and, when understood, actually enriched and informed their learning experience and personal lives in a more meaningful way. This finding was particularly relevant to three other studies (Bailey, 1996; Neuman, 1996; Pierce, 1986, cited in Taylor, 1998) that Taylor states illustrate “the influence of personal contextual factors on a perspective transformation” (p. 27) and which is referred to in these studies as a “readiness for change” (p. 27) in the participants.

For participants in this study, motivation acted as a connector between the anxiety or distress in their individual context and the new knowledge, new ideas, and new perspectives that were presented at graduate school. One definition for motivation



is “the set of processes that arouse, direct, and maintain human behaviour toward attaining some goal” (Greenburg, Barron, Sales, & Owen, 1996, p. 117). This process for motivation was evident in the participants in this study and suggests that transformative learning may provide important insight into this widely studied topic in the fields of psychology and organizational behaviour.

Taylor’s (1998) complaint that “too much emphasis has been placed on the responsibility of the educator, without giving adequate attention to the role and responsibility of the participants in the transformative process” (p. 58) is also worthy of comment here. Although personal responsibility and commitment were evident in the participants’ comments about themselves, it is difficult to be conclusive about how it happened, other than to restate that all participants appeared to need all of the conditions found during the disintegration stage. The role of the educators and the relationships they had with the students appeared to be absolutely, critical in the participants’ description of transformative learning. This was especially the case during the disintegration stage and appeared to lessen significantly once the reintegration stage began. Taylor’s complaint therefore appears to be highly relevant to the findings in this study. The model developed seems to suggest that the environment, and by implication, those who set the aims and policies for that environment, would also share in the responsibility and commitment.

This was an exploratory study, which saw the individual context of the participants as being critical to understanding transformative learning. The importance of the individual participants’ context of life was prompted by several research articles.



In particular, Clark and Wilson's (1991) original critique of Mezirow's work, where they argued against Mezirow's emphasis on the individual transformative learning experience without proper consideration of the social context was particularly helpful. In Clark's (1991, 1992) analysis of the impact of context on transformative learning, he suggested that many personal and social factors influence the process of transformative learning. Taylor (1998) described these factors as including:

The surroundings that make up the immediate learning event, made up of the personal and professional situation of the individual at the time and the more distant background context, involving the familial and social history that has influenced the individual growing up. (p. 26)

Although this study set out at the beginning to examine the phenomenon within the time period and group-related experience of graduate school, many critical incidents were found to have occurred outside of the original time frame. Thus, the time frame of this study was extended beyond just the graduate school experience to incorporate important context-related findings. This facilitated a larger overview of the process and confirmed the importance of prior studies, such as Clark's and Wilson's studies, which sought to emphasize contextual components that play a role in transformative learning.

By situating the individual's context of life within the new context of graduate school, several other influences became apparent. It was not so much the individual life difficulty itself that caused participants to have a transformative learning experience, as it was the people, circumstances, and environment that fostered it, as well as the embeddedness of these within the cognitive, affective, and contextual changes that



occurred. The environment within the life difficulty stage of the process (initially described as an environment of separation, isolation, and abandonment) was first apparent only in some participants. This was because the environment had changed so dramatically at graduate school to one of respect, trust, and confidentiality. This was an important finding because it suggests that the environmental conditions of respect, trust, and confidentiality were perhaps more or at least equally important to transformative learning than preexisting problems of life. The environmental conditions may also explain why certain individuals experience a “disorientating dilemma” resulting from a life difficulty, while others do not. This speaks to the question, if all participants entered into graduate school with a life difficulty, does that imply that there is a connection between preexisting problems and transformative learning? In other words, if there is no existing anxiety or distress, is there no chance of transformative learning?

It was apparent that many participants’ critical incidents of life difficulties were not as traumatic as other participants’ life difficulties. However, they fit into the model because these participants moved from across the country, from well-established jobs, and from personal/familial relationships. In other words, they fit into the model because they physically moved (separation) they relinquished or withdrew from their previous pursuits (isolation), and they were cut off from previous support groups (abandonment). So, whereas some participants experienced heightened life difficulties that initiated other changes, still other participants experienced heightened contextual changes that initiated changes for them. All participants, however, were situated in the model and could be identified in each of the categories.



In a similar vein, it is interesting that the resulting affective, cognitive, and contextual changes also had no set order of development. Rather, the changes were cyclical and not linear; one change appeared to set in motion the other changes, but not all participants started with the same change. All of these findings are relevant because the pattern was apparent in all participants, although the order of occurrence and duration of the process varied.

These findings conveyed to me the importance of individuality in learning. It has heightened my own awareness and appreciation for understanding philosophies of education, theoretical frameworks, and strategies for teaching and individual learning styles. Perhaps most of all, it has demonstrated to me, personally, that one's own experience, however practical and valuable it has been to oneself, will not likely meet the rudimentary needs of a larger group. I view this now as a concern because of the emphasis that Western society places on "experience as king" and the little value our society puts on the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings for education. Another finding that conveyed to me the importance of individuality in learning was the consistent verbalization by participants of reconciling their new meaning perspective with their personal beliefs and goals. It appeared that this cognitive development, more than anything else, was associated with the happiness and empowerment expressed by all participants in their transformative learning experience.

There is a downside to the happiness and empowerment that participants expressed in this study, however. This was evident in the process of disintegration that the majority of the participants described. This was an emotional period, which



involved intense self-exploration. This part of the process warrants discussion for several reasons. One reason is that many other studies identified disorientation and anger as prevalent within the transformative learning experiences. Mezirow's (1995) model, for instance, saw a disorientating dilemma as a "disparate experience in conjunction with a critical reappraisal of previous assumptions and presuppositions" (Taylor, 1998, p. 7). Several of Mezirow's examples of disorientating dilemmas in women returning to school after a long hiatus were evident in the participants' life difficulties of this study; these included job loss, divorce, and a life threatening illness, for example. The difference, however, is that Mezirow considered the disorientating dilemma as the "catalyst of the process" (Taylor, 1998, p. 1). For some individuals, Mezirow described this happening as "a major cataclysmic event" and for others as "an incremental path."

Other studies offer variations to Mezirow's disorientating dilemma. Clark (1991, 1993) for instance, in his look at context in transformative learning, discovered that "integrating circumstances" also played an important role as a trigger. He describes these integrating circumstances as "indefinite periods in which the persons consciously or unconsciously search for something that is missing in their life; when they find this missing piece, the transformation process was catalyzed" (pp. 117- 118). The model developed from this study accommodates both Mezirow's paths and Scott's findings, as well as Pope's (1996) study on women of colour who saw the trigger event "more as an unfolding evolution rather than a response to a crisis." (p. 176 cited in Taylor, 1998, p. 41). This model, however, situates the disorientation and anger within the disintegration



stage, rather than at the very beginning of the process of transformative learning.

Mezirow and other studies which confirm the disorientating dilemma (such as Clark, 1991, 1993) do not offer an adequate explanation as to why these feelings occur. This is the second reason why it warrants further discussion.

The role of emotions in past research of transformative learning was confirmed in the findings from this study. Taylor (1998) cited several unpublished studies that were unavailable (Morgan, 1997; Coffman, 1989; Sveinunggaard, 1993) that “found that critical reflection can begin only once emotions have been validated and worked through” (p. 34). He also stated that one study (Gehrels, 1984) “found feelings to be the trigger for reflection” (p. 34). The transformative learning model developed from this study incorporates the importance of affective changes, cognitive changes, and contextual changes and illustrates just how embedded these all are with individual life contexts and environmental contexts. In this study, participants experienced disintegration as old ways of knowing, old roles and responsibilities, and old relationships literally fell apart; this disintegration disoriented and angered them. The data also conveyed the relative importance of establishing new relationships and positive experiences in new roles, as former relationships and old roles were challenged, threatened, and disintegrated. If transformative learning is understood as a process and not as a blueprint for higher learning, then this study could imply that in order for individuals to move from one stage to the next, all the conditions for that movement must be met. This brings the discussion to the third reason to consider the disintegration stage in further detail.



An important final aspect of the disintegration stage is highlighted by Scott's (1997) study entitled *The Grieving Soul in the Transformation Process*. Scott found that grieving "a significant loss, a loss of a loved one, of a place, of a time, or of a way of making meaning that worked in the past" (p. 45) was critical to transformative learning. This element of grieving was confirmed as part of the final stage of the disintegration process. Participants described feelings of heightened sensitivities and vulnerabilities as they literally struggled to "find their voice" and "piece back together" their "shattered lives," as some participants described it.

It is perhaps noteworthy here to convey my own feelings as participants shared their experiences of this stage with me. I cried on three occasions during data collection. It was quite surprising to hear and see the depth of grief that participants expressed, and I hadn't prepared myself for my own response to it. I felt genuine gratitude that the participants felt they could open themselves up to me in the way they did, but I also felt a sense of foreboding should I enter that role again. I felt quite awestruck by the power of an adult educator because I learned of examples of the influence of power used both for good and for destruction. I will come back to the implications of my own feelings later in the discussion.

A fifth reason for understanding the fragile nature of participants and vulnerabilities of emotions at this stage has to do with the process of self-exploration they engaged in. In order for students to process new knowledge through their meaning perspective, it was first passed through a perspective that had been handed down from familial and cultural conditioning. At the same time that participants were recognizing



where their original perspective had come from, they were learning a new language to communicate it, and they needed validation to move away from it. The familial and cultural influences that originally handed it down to them, in most instances, continued to affect students while in the program. The participants therefore required a stronger environment of respect, trust, and confidentiality in order for them to take personal responsibility for their learning and commitment to attain a new level of self-awareness. This part of the finding demonstrated that many essential components had to be present in order for the participants to move onto the next stage of the process, that of reintegration.

Another reason I want to discuss the stage of disintegration has to do with its relevance to social problems. Although many studies have alluded to the possible utility of transformative learning to deal with social problems, one such study and a recent newscast will be considered here for an example. Williams (1986) conducted a study entitled *Perspective Transformation as an Adult Learning Theory to Explain and Facilitate Change in Male Spouse Abuse*. He found several of the components that participants in my study had in common, such as: separation from past environment, higher self-esteem, internal self-perception of control, and communication. He concluded that

The subjects with higher change in perspective transformation will also change the most toward less use of physically abusive behaviour. Subjects who had the greatest increase in the use of reasoning tactics would also have the greatest change toward less use of abusive behaviour. The background of the batterer



was also significant in predicating change in abusive behaviour as well as age, education, income, and change in sex role preference. It was concluded that this study revealed significant predictive power of change in abusive behaviour and perspective transformation offers a viable theory for explaining the processes that led to spouse abuse and in understanding and facilitating the process of change from abusive behaviour. (p. 324)

I thought of Williams' study a great deal while conducting my own research because it opened many possibilities to the application of my study in other adult learning situations, particularly where social problems were concerned. At the time of writing this discussion, I saw a news report on Canadian Television Viewing (CTV) late night television about the problem of spousal abuse in the Canadian military. Several points were made in the newscast that I thought this study addresses.

The first point was that the Canadian government was going to spend major tax money to produce a report on the extent and the nature of the problem in the military. My question in response to that is why study the meticulous details of the problem instead of focusing on the larger life issues of the solution? Do we really think that physical abuse in the military is that different for individuals outside of the military? Williams' study suggested that the "problem" has been studied enough. I suggest that more profit could be gained by studying the solution.

The second point was that the study would focus mostly on the battered victim and not the batterer. Again, William's comments are relevant:



Due to the women's movement of the seventies and emerging shelters and groups from battered women, much research has been done on the victim of spouse abuse, often bordering on blaming the victim (Wardell, 1981). Little research has been done on programs aimed at changing the batterer (Moore, 1979). Almost all of the theories on the causes of spouse abuse are based on the information gathered from the abused women. (p. 321)

It seems likely, from the model of transformative learning developed from this study, that the perspective, context, and environment of the batterer would have to be understood and factored into the process in order to foster a transformation from abusive behaviour to acceptable behaviour. Research done with this objective would be research dollars well spent. The model developed in this document could serve as a guide to identify where the abusive behaviour (life difficulty) originated, why it was perpetuated (environment, individual context, knowledge, feelings, roles), and, most importantly, how then to move individuals with abusive behaviour on through the processes of disintegration, reintegration, and completion and how to sustain the change.

The third point was that additional monies from taxes were going to provide a 24-hour "hotline" for abused women to call. This study conveyed the importance of a context of acceptance, permission, and safety. An environment of respect, trust, and confidentiality was perceived by participants and developed through relationship building where encouragement, support, and feedback were vital. It was also necessary for students to self-explore and move away from their past environment of separation,



isolation, and abandonment. How much more so would these conditions and environment be vital for women within an abusive relationship? I venture to guess that a phone line for help will meet with minimal success. Abused women are women at serious risk, who would likely have intense levels of disorientation and anger. Their extreme sensitivities and vulnerability would only emphasize their need for seasoned guidance and empathy. These raised points are not meant to criticize sincere efforts to solve the problem of spousal abuse in the military or to minimize it. It is, however, given as an example of how adult learning theory, such as transformative learning, may be applied to life difficulties or social issues in a way that maximizes what we already know about the problem and minimizes the human pain and financial costs associated with it.

The final issue for discussion in this chapter was raised by Taylor's (1998) review of the literature and has to do with the ethics involved for instructors to facilitate transformative learning for adults in the classroom. In his reflective notes, he states the following:

Rationality seems to be significant to transformative learning, though possibly not any more significant than the role of emotions and feelings. However, I tend to think that most educators focus on practices that facilitate rational thinking, such as critical reflection, and do not recognize its interdependent relationship with feelings. The discussion of feelings is something we often avoid in the classroom, arguing they are too subjective for formulating reasons and decisions. The irony is that just because we choose not to discuss them does not



mean they do not exist and exploiting them might actually help in the process of critical reflection. All of this makes me think about the role of education and emotional development. How do I feel about exploring the underlying emotions to thoughts discussed in the classroom? How do I as an adult educator get my students to reflect on and share their feelings in class in a safe and non-threatening manner? What risks are at stake when exploring feelings in the classroom? (p. 35).

I set out in this study to explore the events that engaged graduate students in transformative learning. I outlined in chapter 1 a wide range of problem situations associated with engaging adults in transformative learning and fostering transformative learning in practice. This study has provided answers to these questions for graduate students and has provided some answers for adult educators.

The questions raised by Taylor above, however, require a more personal answer, one that should involve a process of critical self-reflection on the part of anyone interested in adult education. I hope that educators who hear the voices of the adult learners who participated in this study will remember some of their stories, and at the very least, the lessons they have taught. For all of the participants' responses suggested a tremendous onus of responsibility on adult educators. The instructors referred to in the data were perceived by the participants as lifelong learners who conveyed respect and genuine interest in the participants' lives and research interests. Instructor feedback, encouragement, and support were the three most highly praised attributes mentioned by the participants that facilitated both cognitive and affective



changes. This was perhaps best summed up by Boyd and Myers' (1988) description of educators who provided "seasoned guidance and compassionate criticism" as cited in Taylor (1998, p. 58).

There will likely remain a great deal of debate about, whether transformative learning exists and if it does, whether it should be fostered within a graduate school Faculty of Education program. I have thought hard about how to answer this objection and have decided that the answer may be better re-phrased as a story with a few final questions for yet further discussion.

One of my favourite classic essays is entitled *Marketing Myopia* by Theodore Levitt (1960). I would like to share a brief excerpt from this essay as the basis for my story.

Every major industry was once a growth industry. But some that are now riding a wave of growth enthusiasm are very much in the shadow of decline. Others, which are thought of as seasoned growth industries have stopped growing. In every case the reason growth is threatened, slowed, or stopped is not because the market is saturated. It is because there has been a failure of management. The failure is at the top. The executives responsible for it, in the last analysis, are those who deal with broad aims and policies. Thus, the railroads did not stop growing because the need for passenger and freight transportation declined. That grew. The railroads are in trouble today not because the need was filled by others (cars, trucks, airplanes, even telephones), but because it was not filled by the railroads themselves. They let others take customers away from them



because they assumed themselves to be in the railroad business rather than in the transportation business. The reason they defined their industry wrong [sic] was because they were railroad-oriented instead of transportation-oriented; they were product-oriented instead of customer-oriented.

My question, then, is what business is this university and this Faculty of Education, in particular, in? Is it in the business of education or is it in the business of teacher certification and teacher professional development? Are the instructors teacher-oriented or student-oriented? The mission statement in the graduate student handbook for Brock university (1999) has this as its first and main point:

To prepare students for advanced study, career success, community responsibility and a richer life by developing a passion for lifelong learning and the abilities to think creatively and critically, to communicate clearly, to maintain high ethical standards, to exercise sound judgement and to address societal and environmental issues. (p. 8)

This mission statement is descriptive of the transformative learning outcomes identified in this study. Do we believe we can attain this high objective of education without creating the right environment to facilitate transformative learning in graduate students? Is the university perhaps guilty of educational myopia? If the answer is no, then why don't all graduate students in education experience transformative learning? If the answer is yes, then like any business, the failure is at the top and transformative learning should take place there. Are there ethical considerations involved? You bet, just like there are in any serious business. The difference, however, is that in the



business of education, this university has already clearly stated its mission. It could be interpreted as stating that it has an ethical and moral responsibility to students and to the greater community to prepare them for a lifetime of transformative learning.

Graduate students should not settle for less and should consider the ethical considerations of any institution for higher learning that does not facilitate transformative learning.

### **Implications**

Here we are at the “So What?” stage of this thesis. What are the implications for practice, for theory, and for future research that arose from this study? This is the heart of the thesis. I hope the implications I have focused on will keep the research I have begun alive in others and in different applications. For that reason, I will first address the implications separately and will end each section with a list of recommendations.

#### **Implications for Practice**

There are several implications for practice that have a broad application from this study to the field of adult education and others that relate specifically to a graduate school program. First, this study has shown the vital importance of individual context. For the nine participants, learning was significantly heightened because of their motivation and malleability. Identification of background experiences of adult learners going into any program, as well as motivation, objectives, goals, and interests, can help an adult educator to identify and determine the learning needs and requirements of a student.



The realization of the influence that other people exerted on the participants was particularly significant because it posed the general implication of opening the proverbial Pandora's box, both for this study and in the classroom. Some of the past unresolved issues described in this study were of a serious nature, and as I described earlier, I wasn't prepared with my response. This demonstrated the serious risk involved, both, for participants and instructors, to tread carefully and skillfully in this domain of learning and to be prepared for ethical dilemmas. The concern raised by some individuals in education as to this ethical boundary is a valid concern. However, it could be considered similar to being thrown into a lake without knowing how to swim. The risk of drowning is real but never going into the lake is only one option. Teaching people to swim, though time and resource consuming, is a better long-term solution. And so, it should be, with adult educators dealing with ethical considerations in transformative learning. They need to be made aware of the influence and power they wield on adult learners and they should be educated and given tools in transformative learning theory. This is an implication for those who make the aims and policies of the university, as well as those who direct resources. The ethical dilemma and preparation of adult educators needs serious consideration at the management level. As stated at the end of the discussion section, it may require a reevaluation of what business the university is in and a redefining of what ethical and moral responsibility they have to their students and society as a whole.

Acceptance, permission, and a safe environment for learning are paramount conditions to replicate when new information, new ideas, and new perspectives are



introduced. This study could have relevance to adult education in a variety of settings besides graduate school. Although a qualitative study such as this is not generalizable to a larger population, many of the life difficulty conditions that this study revealed could be considered common to other adults. Since adults cannot escape life's difficulties that bring about anxiety or distress, it seems plausible that other settings could replicate the contextual environment and conditions that participants experienced in graduate school. That is, an environment that provides acceptance, permission, and safety for self-exploration to take place could thereby foster the process of transformative learning as described in Table 4. Acceptance, permission, and a safe environment were the three overriding conditions upon which all of the critical incident data were embedded. They would be considered in my construction analogy as the correctly engineered reinforcing material for the foundation.

Permission often came in the form of non-threatening, invitational learning, which encouraged experiential opportunities for self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-growth. The safe environment predominantly rested on the relationship between adult educator and student, which had been built on trust, confidentiality, and a sharing of personal experiences as well as at times, common research interests. Participants suggested that acceptance was initiated by meeting the entrance requirements for graduate school but was later reinforced through a democratic atmosphere where the participants' voices were listened to and valued.

Acceptance was perceived by many participants as a favourable reception, a willingness to listen to them, and a genuine interest in their ideas. Permission was



granted to students in a number of ways. It was seen as an act of allowing and as an act of authorization. Both ideas of acceptance and permission indicate the power that participants associated with the environment at graduate school and with adult educators. The safety perceived by participants in the graduate school environment illustrates that this power was not wielded abusively by adult educators referred to in the data.

Part of the acceptance, permission, and safety came about through the choice and flexibility in activities and assignments that students were offered. Providing many options helped to facilitate individual responsibility and commitment and acted as a form of self-regulation, to the amount of risk a student was willing to accept. Adult educators need to be aware of and capable of using a number of different activities and strategies in their teaching methods. These tools should allow for self-exploration, and the realization that recognition, communication, and validation are necessary components of the self-exploration process.

Recognition of needs, problems, and prior learning patterns must come from within the student. It is not about identifying these elements for the student but guiding them to find it for themselves. Communication of past-experiences, life difficulties, and personal perspectives are important to address early on with students so that both student and educator are aware of these as new knowledge, new ideas, and new perspectives are introduced. Educators must also realize that students are learning a new language and need to be supported to practice that new language both in their speech and in their writing. Educators also need to encourage students in their self-



exploration. This appeared to be achieved in this study by educators listening closely to their students and getting to know them, and the context of their lives. Encouragement further came by students being offered a variety of suggestions or provided alternative ways of doing things, such as the recommendation of certain scholarly works.

Providing students with examples of success stories can also go a long way to encourage them, as well as showing compassionate empathy. Liberal feedback was another important element of self-exploration for participants. This was described as most important in written assignments where verbal communication was often neglected. Students needed feedback in order to grow, to be challenged, and to become self-aware. Although only implied in the data, adult educators must model tolerance and acceptance of other perspectives in the classroom. All of the above components were important in this study to allow students to move into the reintegration stage.

Another implication for practice is the amount of time that was needed for critical reflection, self-exploration, self-growth, and self-discipline. In both of the examples of time-related and group-related studies, what is vital to understand is that transformative learning is a time-consuming process. Transformative learning required sufficient time not only for the student's personal self-exploration but also for the ebb and flow of new knowledge, ideas, and different perspectives to be communicated, probed, and challenged. The time allotment of most graduate school courses was not sufficient to see through the entire process of disintegration and reintegration for the participants in this study. Although the importance of sufficient time has been noted in prior research for transformative learning to occur, such as Taylor (1998), Gallagher



(1997), and Kaminsky (1997), this study provided examples of the process that extended well outside of the normal boundaries of most study periods. These examples also suggest that the process was well underway for several participants prior to graduate school and not yet completed at the end of graduate school for others.

If we remember the sensitivities and vulnerability associated with changes of perspective, the variations in the ways that this change was experienced, and the resulting impact that contextual changes set in motion beyond the life of individual learners, then the issue of time becomes highly relevant for other reasons, as well. Participants experienced critical incidents at different stages of their graduate program, however, the reintegration stage was generally considered by most participants to be actualized by the end of their graduate program. The process was not considered, however, to be entirely complete or singularly linear in nature. Time was needed and opportunities were needed to experience new roles, responsibilities, and learning contexts; these built confidence and helped participants to piece back together missing elements of their lives. Opportunities for new roles and responsibilities must be provided with seasoned guidance and compassion in order for self-confidence and self-esteem to increase.

Mentorship appeared to be one way to accomplish these things. Several incidents occurred outside of the instructor/student relationship in the classroom that were considered possible due to positive and frequent opportunities for access and socialization of students with faculty members outside of the classroom. These opportunities were generally realized through social activities, research assistantship



appointments, and conference activities with faculty. The time and opportunities for these activities appeared to be realized by participants pursuing their master's degree on a full time basis.

The reintegration stage was a stage of discovery that involved comparisons with other students and circumstances. It was interesting that the participants saw themselves very differently than they saw other students. This brings up the question: Should there be a separation of students pursuing studies full-time versus part-time? What about those pursuing studies for professional development as opposed to those intending to go on to higher learning and pursue a career as an academic? Although there are implications for practice from this finding, how those implications would translate into practice is still unclear.

Certainly, it is at least noteworthy that the majority of the participants in this study came into education from other disciplines of study and not with a professional or academic background in education. However, many of the results that occurred with transformative learning for participants in this study, such as new perspectives, greater tolerance and acceptance of others, and greater satisfaction with internal rewards would be of benefit to both pre-service and in-service teachers, especially given the current reforms in education and global indicators for change. Additionally, participants felt joy and excitement with the realization of what they could accomplish and what it meant to be a "Master of Education." Surely, these are worthy objectives for any education program to emulate.



Trends in business, society, and education indicate that it is increasingly more important for open-mindedness and tolerance towards other cultures and points of view. These are the very conditions that indicate when transformative learning has taken place, for, this is how an individual becomes open to, able to understand, and accept other points of view. It is also how one is able to include and integrate these other points of view into their own meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1991a). Transformative learning is one way individuals and whole organizations can cope with the speed and frequency of change in an increasingly global world.

#### Recommendations for Practice:

- The question “What does it mean to be a Master of Education?” could be answered and discussed in an orientation lecture for all students beginning their graduate studies.
- More access to faculty members in a variety of settings (formal, informal, and social) could provide greater opportunities for relationship building, trust, and confidentiality and for the creation of an environment of acceptance, safety, and permission.
- Mentorship relationships should be encouraged with more opportunities for teacher and research assistantships and conference experiences. This would also suggest increased availability of graduate scholarships.



- Instructors need to recognize the risks associated with helping students experience transformative learning. Instructor education and preparation should be provided so that caring and empathetic seasoned guidance is available to graduate students.

### Implications for Theory

The similarity and differences of how participants experienced critical incidents that led to transformative learning warrants further discussion. It speaks to the question as to whether transformative learning is too idiosyncratic to the individual or if theory has actually been built from this study. In the model developed from this research, a distinct pattern was discernable in all participants that involved primarily the identification of four stages of process, namely, life difficulty, disintegration, reintegration, and completion. This pattern would not have been discernable had the study not included contextual factors of the individual participants, which pushed the focus of the study beyond the boundaries of graduate school.

The introduction of a greater time allotment provided a larger canvas on which to view each of the participants' lives and allowed for a comparison of compatible experiences from which the overview was made possible. Despite differences in the time of a stage of the process, sequence of events, initiating change, or passion of expression, all participants' data contributed in their unique way to the development of a transformative learning model. This model could be used to facilitate the construction of foundational elements in transformative learning theory that can be built upon in a variety of settings and other applications. It can also be used to organize the existing body of research in each of the categorical areas identified in the model, allowing for



cross-analysis and embeddedness of these bodies of literature with one another. It would appear that many of the parts of this model have already been researched separately. Now they can be pulled together and organized, much like a general contractor would do with subtrades and suppliers in building a foundation.

### Recommendations for Theory

- Slot and organize the existing scholarly literature with the categories in this model.
- Synthesize the findings of these studies under each category in this model, breaking down the process into activities, identifying activity types, and highlighting connectedness and embeddedness with other categories.
- Develop from existing studies where possible: sequence of activities, time lines, indicating milestones, predecessors, and successor activities with possible lag times.
- Identify human and financial resources required for various activities.

### Implications for Further Research

This study has tremendous generative value. The model developed from the findings has implications for further research in several ways. It could for instance, be used as a framework to accommodate variations in existing models, as explained above. It could also synthesize many approaches to transformative learning including stimulation from instructors, initiation from contextual, cognitive, and affective change, and the role of context, influence of the micro- and macro-environment, and stages of adult life cycle. It can provide answers to the existing critics of transformative learning



theory by situating transformative learning in a context and clearly defining the perspective from which the study was undertaken.

The model resulting from this study has been developed with the learner's voice and perception of critical incidents. Involving other voices that have been silent in this study would likely provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon. This model can inform adult education outside of graduate school through an understanding of foundational concepts that can be integrated and built upon in other settings, time frames, and applications.

There are several things, I would do differently, if I were to do this study again. During the data analysis, I became curious about the psychological type of the participants because I saw many similarities, even though, I did not have any background in psychology nor any real interest in it prior to this study. If I were to do this study again, I would likely include questions that would help me to understand the psychological type of each of the participants. One way to do this could be through the typologies developed by Carl Jung (1971), as described by Cranton (1994).

As well, I would ask the participants about their internal locus of control prior to entering graduate school, since this was a cognitive pattern. It was difficult to measure without having prior knowledge of the participants' locus of control before the study. Finally, I would purposely ask participants to give me their own definition of transformative learning so that I could synthesize all of their answers into one operational definition.



If I were to take on one area to build on this study, it would be to look at the contextual environment. This interest is likely prompted by my area of specialization in graduate school, which is, organizational and administrative studies in education. Since the life difficulties identified in this study did not appear to be particularly unusual to adults in general, I think that greater gain could come from a closer examination of the contextual environment. I would delve deeper into the components of acceptance, permission, and safety that provided the necessary conditions for change for the participants in this study within an organizational context.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

- How can feelings of anxiety and distress be used to motivate and predispose individuals to change?
- How can new knowledge, new ideas, and new perspectives replace insecurities and missing elements in people's lives?
- In what situations do separation, isolation, and feelings of abandonment manifest themselves?
- How can acceptance, permission, and safety be replicated in other settings beyond graduate school?
- Would the model follow the same process in reverse?

#### **Final Thoughts**

Throughout my discussion in this final chapter, I have used a construction metaphor to help me describe my model for transformative learning. I suggested that



the four stages in the model--life difficulty, disintegration, reintegration, and completion--were like four cornerstones in a building foundation. The critical incidents from the participants provided the mortar for the foundation, and the graduate school environment provided the necessary reinforcing steel. Adult educators worked as skilled labourers using a variety of tools and forming materials. I discussed the importance of environmental conditions and the importance of time for proper curing to take place.

It is important to remember that a foundation is not an end in itself. It is meant to be built upon, and foundations are generally not noticed or paid attention to, although they are considered the most important part of the construction process. A solid foundation can be built upon in many ways and can generally accept a variety of applications. Thus, a well-laid foundation is able to accommodate change. However, you cannot build a structure like the CN Tower on a foundation intended for a garden shed. As well, the extent to which a foundation can be built upon depends on many factors besides the desired size of building. For example, in Canada, you would need a deeper foundation for a home than in the southern US because of our cold climate. The state of California, an area designated as an earthquake zone, would require more reinforcing steel in its foundations than other areas not designated with this zone. There are many analogies, which could be drawn from this construction metaphor. However, most importantly, I want to emphasize that a foundation only becomes exciting once we get to see what is built on it and how it is used. I think this is really the answer to the "So What?" question of studying transformative learning.



The participants, in this study, demonstrated a heightened personal and social responsibility and commitment. This was evident in several ways but particularly in the way they described their own personal development and their description of the reasons they wanted to pursue doctoral studies. I found a genuine desire and commitment in them all to improve the quality of other people's lives through the means of education and the practical outworking of their research interests. Their own sense of liberation was being directed in action toward others who may be experiencing oppressive elements in their lives. This social element seemed to closely resemble what Friere (1970) described as conscientization. The personal element of participants appeared to incorporate both components of Boyd's (1991) inner journey of individuation and Mezirow's (1991a) perspective transformation. It was difficult to differentiate transformative learning between these two alternative perspectives within the personal element.

Taylor (1998) asked the following questions in his section on defining a perspective transformation: What is the consequence of changing your worldview? And what are related outcomes of revising meaning perspectives? (p. 42). When we consider the consequences and related outcomes for participants in this study, it confirmed that adult learners are multifaceted learners. Their lives are shaped cognitively, affectively, and contextually by the ability or restriction of free will and choice, personal needs and wants, and motivation and drive. These elements are situated in their lifetime, historically, and currently, and are influenced by future aspirations. If adult learners are



multifaceted learners, then we shouldn't be surprised that the consequence and related outcomes of transformative learning would also be multifaceted.

This research endeavour has facilitated the development of a foundation model for transformative learning. It will be exciting to watch what will be built on this foundation by each of the nine participants and to learn how it will be used for their personal development and the greater good of society. Those who shared with me their transformative learning stories have given me much to build on as well and I look forward to the challenge.



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### **Appendix A: Questionnaire**

The general instructions for completing the questionnaire were as follows:

Write down, in no more than half a page, a brief description of an incident in each question. Make sure that you include the following details about the incident: (1) where you were, (2) who was involved (roles and job titles only- no personal names), (3) how and when it happened.

#### **Part One: Descriptive Questions**

The incidents to be described were as follows:

1. Think back to when you first started your Master of Education program, describe your background and what you brought with you to this program.
2. Now that you have completed all of your required courses and at least one full year in the Master of Education program, identify your most vivid incident that led to profound cognitive (thinking) and affective (feeling) change(s) for you as a graduate student.
3. Identify the most vivid incident when your meaning perspective changed.  
  
This is an incident when you thought to yourself, or out loud, “Gee, I never thought of that” also known as a “GINTOT”.



4. In the above mentioned two incidents, what was the triggering event? A trigger, for the purpose of this study, is described as “some unexpected happening; an AHA!, or a surprise, which produces inner discomfort or perplexity” (Brookfield,1987.p.24). Please include whether you view the trigger to be a positive or negative mechanism of change and why.

#### Part Two: Analytical Questions

5. You have described your background experience and what you brought with you to this program. How would you describe yourself now? Has your description changed from when you started the program, and if so, how?
6. You have identified a critical incident in question two that led to profound cognitive (thinking) and affective (feeling) changes. How have those changes manifested themselves in your life now? How do you think they might influence your personal development in the future?
7. You have described in question three a “GINTOT” (Gee, I never thought of that) as a critical incident. How did that incident make you think and feel? What occurred as a result of that GINTOT, if anything?
8. You have described in question four the triggering events for the two critical incidents in this questionnaire. What significance or implications do you see for recognizing these triggering events for a graduate program?



## Appendix B: Interview Questions

The following set of questions were used to guide the interview process:

### Part One: Metacognitive Questions

1. What did you believe about teaching, learning, and student-teacher relationships when you started the program (i.e., your philosophy of education and theories for teaching)? Where did those beliefs come from?
2. What has happened to your own beliefs about teaching, learning, and student-teacher relationships while in the program or after the program?
3. How have you noticed your thinking and feelings changing while in the graduate program?

### Part Two: Evaluative Questions

4. How did your experience in the graduate program compare to your previous experiences and to other students' experiences that you know of?
5. How could you make your learning more meaningful and relevant for yourself and for other classmates?



6. What role might instructors and classmates play in promoting a climate of curiosity and experimentation? What role would you play?

### Part Three: Reconstructive Questions

7. What changes do you think are necessary to your thought patterns and to your response patterns?
8. Where, or to whom, do you go for support and encouragement when “tough times” hit?
9. What could be done differently to facilitate transformative learning for you in the graduate program?
10. What would you do differently to facilitate your own transformative learning in the graduate program?



## **Appendix C: Cover Story**

# **Cover Story for Qualitative Research On Transformative Learning**

### **Introduction**

This paper has been written to formally introduce myself and my research objectives to perspective research participants. It may be used verbally or in its written format to explain what I am doing and also to prepare individuals for taking part in my data collection.

### **Who you are**

My name is Deborah Mindorff. I am presently studying full time at Brock University and working towards my Master of Education Degree. I also obtained my undergraduate degree recently from Brock in Business and International Studies. I am a mature student who has returned to school after ten years of working within the private sector.

### **What you are doing**

In order to fulfil the requirements of obtaining my Master of Education Degree, I must present a proposal and a thesis on a topic that relates to education. My broad topic of interest is adult education and within that, transformative learning. I am interested in the events that engage graduate students in transformative learning. I want to know what happens to graduate students while in the Master of Education program, that leads to their own perception of profound personal and thinking changes. More specifically, I want to know what critical incidents can be identified by graduate students that best describe their background and what they brought with them into the program, and what critical incidents took them into a new direction in their learning. As well, I want to know how, and why, the students themselves, believe these incidents were triggered.

### **Why you are doing it**

My reasons for doing this study are twofold. The first reason is a personal one. I recognized several critical incidents in my own learning this past year. These critical incidents all centered on assignments involving intensive journal writing that required reflection and critical analysis of my personal perspective and assumptions. I now recognize, after reflection, triggering events that started this process. These were times when the light bulb went on in my head and I began to move in a different direction. Importantly, these critical



incidents have resulted in identifiable changes, most particularly in my choice of thesis topic and research interests.

My second reason has to do with my curiosity about adult education. I have wondered if other graduate students have experienced similar transformative learning, and if so, 'What are the critical incidents/triggering events that stand out in their mind? I wonder if their experience of transformative learning is similar to mine, is different from mine, or if they experienced any transformation at all. This inquiry follows Wolcott's (1985) assertion that all cases are in certain aspects like all other cases, like some other cases and like no other cases.

### **What you will do with the results**

There are three audiences that I will look to for avenues of presenting my studies. These are graduate students, instructors in adult education, both at the university and college level, and Ministry of Education Administrators.

For students, this study can help prepare them in understanding the purpose and process of graduate studies. It can make them more cognitive of their own learning triggers and help them to identify critical incidents. This can lead to the development of their personal learning ethos within the philosophies and theories of adult education, teaching strategies and instructional environment. I suspect that the background context of the graduate student plays a much greater role than is presently recognized at the university. It is hoped that a new practice will emerge out of this study that will help students entering into the graduate program to assess their background and what they feel they themselves are bringing to the program.

For instructors of adult education, university graduate courses in particular, this study can provide insight into the triggering events/critical incidents and subsequent patterns of adult learning which can be incorporated into teaching strategies in the classroom. It can also reveal to instructors and administrators of graduate programs, the importance and significance of student context, instructional environments, and learning outcomes. These elements are relative to curriculum development, entrance and exit requirements and evaluative techniques.

At this generative part of my study, I am simply trying to build theory and/or determine if the nature of this study is too idiosyncratic to allow for theory building of any kind. Regardless of the outcome, this study can have implications for further research in a number of different ways. First, and in the most general sense, it will add to the existing knowledge of the adult learning phenomenon and therefore may contribute relevance to understanding the development of the adult learner, teaching theories and strategies, and existing philosophies of education.

Second, and more specifically, once I identify the components as being important to transformative learning, these components would need to be tested across a wider population. This testing could consider for instance, if, such variables as; age, gender, work, background education, etc. has any effect in the ways that graduate students engage in the process of transformative learning.



The results, conclusions and/or recommendations will be distributed through a power point or slide presentation format suitable for any conference on adult education. I will also have my results displayed on posters, for exhibit at a Poster Workshop, such as the annual event held at the university. Since I intend to write several journal articles as well, I will present my findings in tables and chart form in my thesis for easy transferability to these articles.

### **How the study site and participants were selected**

I will employ purposive sampling (Neuman, 1997) of my fellow graduate students who have taken all of their intake courses and been in the program for at least one year. The purposive sampling is chosen because I want to select “particular types of cases for in depth investigation” (Neuman, 1997, p. 206).

I have access to some of these students from my own class contact lists and already have built up rapport with many of them, two important aspects of interviewing (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Neuman, 1997). In order to select further participants, I will use snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is when you ask the participants to provide you with name(s) of other people that they feel would be suitable for your type of study (Neuman, 1997). This is a multi-stage process and may also involve students recently graduated from the Master of Education program, if I can receive permission to access contact information for these individuals.

### **Any possible benefits as well as risks to the participants**

I expect certain benefits for participants as a result of participation in this study. I will be asking questions that require critical thinking and reflection of an individual’s learning process. These questions can help participants identify and understand their own learning ethos, as well as make them aware of how assumptions influence the way they, and others, think and act. In doing so, the participants will become aware of the nuances of adult education, and how adults achieve transformative learning. Participants not yet engaged in their own research exit requirements, may also benefit from the experience of being involved in some one else’s research.

I do not anticipate any risk to the participants, however, this study will be conducted as specified in the Brock University Faculty Handbook using the guidelines stated in the Principles of Ethical Research with Human Participants. I will be using pseudonyms for all participants to maintain anonymity. An informed Consent Form will be used to outline the parameters, purpose, and uses of the data collected for this study and will be signed by each participant at the initial meeting.

### **The promise of confidentiality and anonymity to participants and site**

I want to make it clear to all the participants that the tape recordings and notes of all the interviews, although being made available to them for review and editing will remain part of



my research collection. In every instance, confidentiality of “off the record” information will be maintained and in the academic research anonymity of participants will be paramount.

### **How long you expect the session to last?**

I estimate three visits with the participant during the data collection stage of this research. The first visit will be for the initial contact and delivery of the questionnaire. The second visit will be for the actual interview and the third visit for member checking and verification of the transcribed data. Each of these visits is expected to be no longer than one hour in length, but may vary depending on individual preferences. All of my participants may decline to answer a question or may withdraw from this study at any time.

### **What will be the extent of the involvement of the participants in this study?**

I am sending out this cover letter as part of my pre-data collection activities. If you agree to participate in this study and respond to my invitation, I will set up an initial meeting to explain in further detail the purpose of my research, get a consent form signed and hand deliver a copy of the research questionnaire. This should take no longer than a half an hour. The questionnaire consists of four questions, to which a maximum half page type written response is requested. I will include a self-addressed stamped envelope for your convenience to send me back your response from the questionnaire.

Additionally, I will interview all participants. I will do this to provide more than one method of data collection, which facilitates individual strengths of reporting styles and ways of knowing. Upon receiving the returned research questionnaire from each of the participants, I will set up a second meeting time, convenient to the participants to conduct the interview. The interview time should range between 1 to 2 hours in length and will be tape-recorded. I will transcribe the tape recordings onto a word processor within 48 hours of the interview, while the information is still fresh to me. Using these two methods of data collection will also act as a form of a validity check to each method. I can compare if the questionnaire responses and the interview responses are congruent, this will allow for further inquiry during the final member-checking meeting. This final meeting should not take longer than one hour.

The selection of the interview site will be determined by the desired convenience of the participants. The site locations will most likely include either: the participants home, a classroom at the University, or a neutral meeting location, such as a quiet restaurant.

### **Requests to record written and verbal word**

It is my intention to utilize a tape recorder to record the interviews. This will greatly free me up as the interviewer to listen more carefully and yet accurately record the participants



answers. I will ask permission from each of the participants to use this method and be sensitive to turning such devices off, if the situation arises.

### **Clarification that you are present not to judge or evaluate, but to understand**

This study is an exploratory and descriptive study of voluntary participants. It is not my intention to pass judgement, or evaluate their learning in any way but to understand critical incidents/triggering events that may be perceived by the participants as related to their own transformative learning. The nature of this study may be too idiosyncratic to allow for theory building, which is why this type of qualitative research method has been chosen.

### **Clarification that they are the experts and teachers**

I look forward to getting to know my fellow graduate students on a personal level and building rapport over the next several months. I am certainly not approaching this research as an expert in the field of transformative learning but as a student. I am looking at the participants in this research as my teachers.

### **References**

- Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992) Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Neuman, L. W. (1997). Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative Approaches. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Wolcott, H. (1995). The art of fieldwork. London: Altimira.



### **Appendix D: Member Check and Demographic Questionnaire**

For convenience sake, I am sending a copy of your interview transcripts for your review via e-mail. Please add anything that you feel was missed or make any changes you feel are necessary and report back to me ASAP.

Also, I would appreciate if you would fill out the following information for background demographic information for my study. Please feel completely free to withhold any information that you would rather not divulge:

1. Present Mailing Address (For future contact)
2. Age:
3. Marital Status and children (if any):
4. Area of Specialization in the Master's Program:
5. Proposed area of Doctoral studies (if applicable);
6. Present Employment (if applicable):



## Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

### Brock University Department of Education

Title of Study: "Exploring the Events that Engage Graduate Students in Transformative Learning".

Researchers: Deborah Joan Mindorff

Supervising Professor: Coral Mitchell

Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that this study in which I have agreed to participate will investigate the events that engaged me in transformative learning during my graduate studies. This study will be in the form of a questionnaire that will ask for a description of various critical incidents and an in-depth interview, that will be audio-taped.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without penalty.

I understand that there is no obligation to answer any question of this project that I consider invasive and that I will have an opportunity to check the accuracy of my answers and words from the interview and make changes, if appropriate.

I understand that all personal data will be kept strictly confidential and that all information will be coded so that my name is not associated with my answers, if I wish to remain anonymous. I understand that only the researchers named above would then have access to the data.

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, you can contact Deborah Mindorff at (905) 687-9018 or Professor Mitchell at (905) 688-5550, extension 4413.



Feedback about the use of the data collected will be available during the month of May, 2000. A written explanation will be provided for you upon request.

Thanks for your help! Please take one copy of this form with you for further reference.

\*\*\*\*\*

I have fully explained the procedures of this study to the above volunteer.

Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix F: Critical Incident Data

Table F2

### First Critical Incident and Trigger

Participant Number and Pseudonyms	First Critical Incident	Triggering Event	Viewed as Negative or Positive? Why?
1. Joanne	Incident-class activity Writing assignment	Feedback from instructor	Positive- rewarded and inspired me, increase in self confidence
2. Gwen	Incident- one on one discussion with advisor	Tears brought on by discussion with advisor	Positive-recognition at a cognitive level
3. Willy	Process- integrating circumstances	Class material- text	Both positive and negative
4. Jennifer	Process- integrating circumstances	"When I began to understand what patriarchy meant for myself and for society". Self Reflection	Positive- " I began to understand my life and various events in new ways". Positive-led to finding research topic
5. Stephanie	Incident- class activity Journal Writing		Positive- whole program provided opportunity for exploration
6. Aaron	Process- integrating circumstance	One to one access with faculty	
7. Brian	Incident- Giving a paper at a conference overseas	New roles & challenges/ conversations/ involvement / support and encouragement of ideas	Negative at the time but later viewed as positive
8. Philip	Incident-class activity- developing a model	Challenges presented by instructor	Positive- put perspective on people's behaviour. Understanding people's role and importance of each for balance".
9. Roger	Incident-Publishing papers and presenting at conferences	Don't really recall- suggest it was question & ideas of others	Not described as either positive or negative.



Table F3

Second Critical Incident and Trigger

Participant Number and Pseudonyms	Second Critical Incident GINTOT	Triggering Event	Viewed as Negative or Positive? Why?
1. Joanne	Class activity-writing - weekly insight cards	Thoughts of professor	Positive-thought provoking and gave a better understanding of self
2. Gwen	Class activity-group discussion	Male teacher response in discussion	Positive- it led to more reading & speaking about empowerment to other women. Gave a better understanding of self/ look at things differently now. Felt anger also.
3. Willy	Class activity-group discussion and work	Unfairness of grading scheme	Positive and negative- "I realized I was perpetuating a system that I don't believe in" "I realized the unfairness of education" "It reinforced childhood view that school's not fair".
4. Jennifer	Class activity-video "Who's counting"	Recognizing the interplay of patriarchy and capitalism	Positive- "I realized how much of women's oppression is systematically perpetuated. It made me feel overwhelmed. It seemed very powerful to finally understand some things about my life that had until then only been mass confusion".
5. Stephanie	One on one discussion with professor	Comment from a professor	Positive- "when I realized I still have a place in education and have a useful thing to offer".
6. Aaron	Class activity-writing assignment	During the process of writing	Positive overall not in the class environment or program per se but being able to develop some of the writings within course obligations- then having sent on these papers for publication.
7. Brian	Reading	The works of George Kelly	Positive- support and encouragement of ideas.
8. Philip	Class activity-writing a paper for advance quantitative research class	Challenges from professor	Positive- "when I realized the importance of standardized residuals". Also it was an amazing leap in my understanding of correlation and regression analysis".
9. Roger	Class activities-Readings and discussions	Nothing specific-questions or ideas presented by others	Positive- Recognize them as "merely the experiences of any full time graduate program- working with mentors, working in authentic situations on meaningful activities that are part of your professional life".









